National Folk Sports in the USSR

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FOLK GAMES

The eyes of the world turn to Moscow as the Olympic flame ignites in the Lenin Stadium, signalling the opening of the 22nd Olympic Games. This is far more than a sporting occasion: sport in the modern world has long had special meaning. Sporting contests attract millions of spectators who often develop an empathy with the athletic actors before them as they experience the excitement of competition. And the Olympics is no ordinary championship. It is the world forum of the fastest, strongest, most skilful athletes.

The Soviet Union earned the right to stage the Olympic Games as one of the world's strongest sporting nations. And the attainments of its sportsmen justly belong to all the diverse peoples who populate the world's largest country. Such a rich mine of sports talent, now harnessed to a purposeful system, goes deep into popular traditions spanning the centuries. Such are the roots for success of world-renowned athletes like Vasily Alexeyev, Soslan Andiev, Valery Borzov, Vladimir Yashchenko, Galina Kulakova and Tatiana Averina.

Such well-known sports as golf, cricket, baseball, *bocce* and *lacrosse* have all featured at one time or other in the Olympic programme; and they all have their roots in popular traditions: golf from Scotland, cricket—England, baseball—America, *bocce*—Italy, and *lacrosse*—Canada. A full list of sports or games that are widely popular yet associated with one country would take up several pages: *sumo* and *kendo* from Japan, surfing from Oceania, curling from Scotland, *pelota* from Spain, hurling from Ireland, glima from Iceland, *oina* from Romania, *pesäpallo* from Finland, *pelota al cesto* and *pato* from Argentina, *korfball* from Sweden, rink hockey from Portugal. And so it could go on. There is probably no country in the world that does not lay claim to its own peculiar brand of national sport. The Soviet Union is no exception. After all, it is a vast multinational country with over a hundred distinctly different nationalities residing within its borders: Russians and Ukrain-

ians, Uzbeks and Byelorussians, Tatars and Kazakhs, Azerbaijanians and Armenians, Georgians and Moldavians, Lithuanians and Tajiks, Chuvash and Turkmens, Kirghiz and Latvians. And each takes pride in its own sports personality; each possesses its own national games and contests.

Although the words *trynta* and *chidaoba* will mean nothing to most sports enthusiasts, they are two of the popular pursuits going back several centuries in the traditions of the Moldavians and the Georgians respectively. They, like many other folk games, have down the ages stirred the heart and turned local festivals into real Olympiads for Georgians and Tuvinians, Tajiks and Yakuts, Armenians and Kazakhs. To be a victor in such games is no doubt as keenly-contested and honourable an achievement as in the most prestigious of world championships of our times.

It would be wrong to assume that all national sports and folk games have survived or held their place down to the present. Many have not stood the test of history: such as *babki** and *svaika*** among the Russians, *mkerdaoba* in Georgia, *saish* and *chougan* in Uzbekistan. Others, however, have been jealously preserved and flourish today. Many even feature in the official Soviet sports classification standards. If, for example, someone wants to attain the title of Master of Sport in axe-throwing, he must project his 350 gram missile over 120 metres. Some nationalities in the Soviet Far North practise the sport of sledge jumping: in this event the Master standard is to clear 75 sledges in a row (along the ground) or 30 sledges (in the snow) without a pause.

Why should such esoteric folk games be preserved in an age of athletics and gymnastics, boxing and sculling, figure skating and tennis, football and ice hockey? After all, modern industrial and urban life would seem to be eroding folk festivals. Yet, on the other hand, it is important to preserve national traditions and even to promote modern Olympic sports with the aid of folk games. Let us take wrestling as an example. There is probably no nation in the world that does not practise this most popular of all folk sports. And each nationality has its own

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* *Babki* is a game using bones; one bone is used to knock two or more configurations of bones out of a circle.

** *Svaika* is a game in which a spear is thrown to land in the middle of a metal ring lying on the ground some distance away. (*Tr.*)

peculiar brand of the sport, at least historically. In one case, the opponents grip each other's clothing or waist band; in another, they take a grip on each other's arms or trunk. In one case, they stand upright and do not touch the opponent's legs; in another, they try to trip him up and wrestle on the ground. The variations are almost endless.

Virtually every nationality in the USSR has its own long-popular form of wrestling with its peculiar ritual: *chidaoba* in Georgia, *koch* in Armenia, *gyulesh* in Azerbaijan, *kurash* in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, *kuresh* in Kirghizia, *kures* in Kazakhstan, *huresh* in Tuva, *hapsagai* in Yakutia and *trynta* in Moldavia. It is an interesting observation that half the total number of Soviet Olympic and world wrestling champions had their start in sport from their native wrestling style. What is more, the synthesis of several folk wrestling styles led to the creation of *sambo* *.

Many countries know the game of field hockey which has featured in the last three Olympic Games. Southern republics of the Soviet Union play an old version of this sport as, for example, *chavgonbozi* in Tajikistan and *makanahakh* in Armenia. Similarly, variations on equestrian polo have long been popular in Georgia (*tskhenburti*), Azerbaijan (*chovgan*) and Tajikistan (*guibozi*).

A great variety of games have existed since ancient times throughout the vast lands of Russia, as means of physical and military training, as contests based on work traditions, and as diversion at folk festivals. Many of them are long forgotten, but some still survive in far-flung corners of the land. There are so many it would be difficult to list them all, but a few are worthy of special mention.

Training in stamina and the military arts is a time-honoured tradition among the Slavs; these qualities were cultivated in various ways through regular exercise which was invariably linked with daily life and based on early organisation of physical training. The foundation of this everyday physical training among Slavs may be sought in swimming and rowing, skiing, horse-racing, spear-throwing and other no less risky pursuits engaged in by young Russians from about the tenth century.

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* *Sambo* is the Russian acronym of *samozashchita bez oruzhiya* (unarmed combat); the sport is not dissimilar to judo. (*Tr.*)

The Russian legend of Kozhemyaka, who is said to have halted an ox with his bare hands and impressed even the great Prince Vladimir of Kiev with his feats of strength, has some historical basis, for the Lavrentian Chronicle tells of a contest between an ox and a bold youth. It also reports that before Kozhemyaka went forth to fight the enraged beast, Vladimir himself tested his strength and was left in no doubt as to his power.

The constant threat of attack from fierce nomadic tribes encouraged daily exercise in various "sports". Horse-riding included such valued feats as mounting a horse while on the move, vaulting over a horse and all manner of tricks from the saddle. Almost all the royal horsemen therefore could "ride a horse's mane and shoot an arrow at full gallop". Not only could they shoot an arrow, they could hit a moving target: often this was a shield raised and lowered on a pole by a boy lying in wait.

Mass games took place among the Slavs mainly at weddings, fêtes, wakes, clan assemblies and after court hearings—irrespective of the outcome. But the most ancient of all contests took place at the crossroads of the big trade routes. Besides all the above-mentioned games, the Slavs would certainly have a tug-of-war in which a whole village would pit its strength against another by pulling a thick pole or hempen rope.

From the eleventh century onwards the feudal aristocracy took delight in horse-racing and hunting. Archeologists have unearthed the remains of an entire racecourse and stables on Old Kiev Hill where the princely palace once stood.

Professor P. A. Lavrovsky, an eminent researcher into Russian folk customs, has written of some fascinating and unique contests: the best divers and swimmers would gather in early June on the banks of the River Pochaina, a tributary of the Dnieper. In the rays of the setting sun they would all dive into the river together and remain there until full sunset. The divers had to catch with their hands the fish that swam under Pochaina's banks and toss them onto the grass. The winner was the person who managed to catch the biggest fish; he therefore had not only to be an excellent swimmer but an expert at staying underwater for long periods. When the dying rays of the sun went down beyond the Kiev hills, the victor was awarded his prize: a silken fishing net woven by the prince's servants.

In social significance, the military and physical training system of the feudal principalities of Ancient Russia was more

progressive than that of the knightly system of Western Europe. This may be put down to the specific development of the Russian people and, especially, the enormous part played in that development by the people's volunteer corps (the so-called *opolcheniye*). It was, after all, the Slav *druzhinas* or troops which saved West European civilisation by bearing the main thrust of the Mongol-Tatar invasion.

About that time (12th-14th centuries), one of the principal forms of contest among the Russian *druzhinniks* was the 20 or even 25 versts (21.2 and 26.5 km respectively) running race. The soldiers would carry one or even two companions on their backs (to practice carrying wounded from the field of battle), would practice at tree climbing and even swinging from tree to tree.

The games and exercises of the Russian people are recorded in the chronicles and in folklore, as reflected in a whole list of proverbs lauding the strong and the agile.

One of the most ancient and popular amusements was fist-fighting. The first recorded meetings of fist-fighters date from sometime in the seventh and eighth centuries. These normally took the form of group fisticuffs which long kept alive remnants of old traditions. Only slight modifications took place in fighting methods and tactics of unarmed combat over the centuries, ever since tribal relations began gradually to disintegrate. Already from the tenth century a crowd of fighters would be led by the elder of their clan, and sometimes the contest would be confined to just the two strongest pugilists. A reflection of later military influences is the line-up of *druzhinniks* against a similar row of men, and classification by age. In the traditional Slav game known as "wall-to-wall fighting", the combatants would form three lines and go into the fight one after the other. Reserves would line up separately.

The age-group principle was always a distinguishing feature of group Slav games, as is evident from historical and literary accounts of the 14th and 15th centuries, and even later.

Thus, the combatants would divide up into three or even four detachments. The first line of fighters would normally consist of 13-16 year-old boys, the second of 17-19 year-olds, the third of 20-25 year-olds and the fourth of the over-25s. The initiators of such games would be young boys whose teasing would gradually take on a serious character.

The regulations governing such fist-fights reflected the tactics of defeating the enemy in hand-to-hand fighting; this had been

part of the Russian warfare stock-in-trade since very earliest times. One of the principal conventions was "to fight face to face and chest to chest". The educative significance of this paragraph lies in the ban on striking from behind; the rule encouraged bravery and a sense of honour. The unwritten ethics of folk fist-fighting contests also strongly militated against hitting an opponent when down, tripping, putting iron or copper coins in one's gloves, crossing a boundary line, kicking and much besides. Altogether the rules extended to over twenty paragraphs.

It is worthy of mention that the prince's *druzhinas* also contained three groups of soldiers, not so much distinguished by age as by wealth and birth. At the top were the "best men" or "thinking boyars"; then came the "younger" or "adolescents" who were the "prince's bodyguard"; thirdly, the "howlers" or the "bravest of the brave" were the mainstay of the prince's *druzhina* in the heyday of the Kievan state right up to the 11th century.

Cudgeling was also common among the *druzhinniks*. In training in close-arm combat they had to bear in mind the possible use of short weapons like clubs and swords and unarmed combat generally.

Very often the fist-fights would take place in winter over the ice of rivers and lakes which served as the boundaries between two villages or town districts. Fights were also held on old battlefields as a mark of respect to the memory of fallen warriors. Even in the early part of the present century the village of Pokrovskoye in Yaroslavl Region would hold fist-fights on the River Syt where, it was said, the Russians had locked swords with the Mongol-Tatar armies of Batu (mid-13th century). Up to the early part of the last century the glorious tradition continued in the town of Livny (nowadays Orlov Region) of building a bonfire and having songs, wrestling and fist-fights on the burial place of Livenian warriors who had given their lives in battles with the Mongol-Tatars.

Down the ages the Russian tradition has been to uphold fair fighting and the ethical conventions formed over the centuries; a strong censure applies to any fist-fighter who fights with evil intent or in an intoxicated state.

Fist-fights as popular diversions have existed in Russia for more than a thousand years. Their main virtue may be said to be that in their classical popular form they have helped to

foster bravery, strength and honour. The expression "an honourable fight" is one much respected down the years.

When archeologists unearthed the famous Chernigov burial mound, Gulbishche, they discovered a mass of *babki*—the lower bones of sheep legs as well as their bronze replicas. The same finds were made by archeologists at the Yablonov burial ground. They did not cause scientists a great deal of surprise, for *babki* had always taken a place of honour among the ancient amusements of Kiev Rus as a widespread and favourite game. Until relatively recently the game was well known to every village lad.

The game of *babki* was played with small bones from sheep or cow feet across a village street by any number of players; each would have to throw down a line of bones erected at varying distances away from the thrower and in various configurations. The winner was, of course, the player with the most accurate aim. In this way, a keen eye and coordinated movement were developed in children from infancy. One of the oldest versions of the game has been found among Siberians: there the bones were knocked down by arrows. And since the number of players was unlimited, on holidays the contests could go on from early morning to late evening.

A version of stick-throwing was to take a short stick and hit it as far as possible with a bigger stick. Here is an old description of the game, known as *chizhik:*

> "Two players, both with sticks which are called bats. In addition, they prepare another very short stick seven inches long and sharpen it at both ends. This stick is known as a *chizhik.* A circle or square is then drawn on the ground and one of the players stands with the *chizhik* within the drawn line while the other moves away. The *chizhik* is placed on the ground, the player hits its sharp end with his bat and, as it flies up, has to hit it in flight so that it is projected as far as possible. If that player strikes up the *chizhik* thrice but fails to project it outside the playing area he is considered to have lost and has to change places with the second player. If, however, the player strikes the *chizhik* outside the playing area it is the task of the fielder to intercept the *chizhik* in flight with his own bat. If he succeeds he goes into the playing area. Should he fail and the *chizhik* hits the ground, he has to pick it up and throw it back into the playing area. If it then lands on the right

spot, he may change places again with the first player and take his turn in hitting the *chizhik*."

It may surprise some Englishmen to learn that ancient Rus knew games reminiscent of cricket; they had various names: *pyzh, shpen, klyak, kliok, chaiki* and *mushki.* True, no stumps were used; instead they stuck sticks into the ground or used thick staves standing on the ground. These "stumps" had to be knocked over not with a ball, but with either a stick or some other projectile. As in cricket, one player took another's place when the "stumps" were hit.

The old Russian game of *chur* was popular in the settlements of Central Russia even in the last century and may be considered the greatest team game of them all. In so far as it was held in honour of an ancestor of the entire clan, the game would not infrequently claim hundreds of players from the same clan. The players would be divided into two teams and, with the aid of long curving sticks (like hockey sticks) they would try to drive a little ball (or small wooden object) into their opponents' "goal" or hole in the ground. The game usually took place on an even part of a meadow and the holes were divided up at a distance of about two metres from one another. There could be any number of holes from two to eight. In wintertime the game was played on the ice surface of a river or a lake. The holes were meant to be the "town"; and if the ball landed in the hole it was counted as "a town burned down". The entire game symbolised a struggle to hold one's town.

In the north-west of the USSR, in the Republic of Byelorussia, such games as *azyarot* and *gula* have survived over the years. Originally, implements for the game of *azyarot* were a tall ladder (the *azyarot*) and an ordinary shaft-bow from a horse's harness. The shaft was thrown so that one end hit the ground and bounced up to pass over the ladder. In the game of *gula,* the strongest person in a team had to try to roll a cartwheel as far as he could; his opponents were supposed to stop the wheel with stakes as soon as possible. From there the opponents had to send the wheel back towards the first team. The winning team was the first to despatch the wheel beyond a certain line.

Over the years the sporting inventory changed: balls of leather or rubber or filled with wool replaced wooden chocks and bones. The hitting stick was transformed into a flat bat or

racket. Although both the ball and the bat have a wide independent existence, they most frequently figure together.

The most widespread game would seem to be one in which a stick was aimed at a target (at a chock or some other stick stuck into the ground or placed upright on the ground)—similar to cricket. In another form, a chock or, even better, a ball, would be despatched at a target, more often as not towards a hole dug in the ground—similar to golf. A stick and ball were used in other games in which the players have to run a certain distance. Among Russians such a game was *lapta* and its variations which are known in various countries as rounders, baseball, softball, *pesäpallo, oina* and even cricket. Another variant of the stick game is when the stick or bat is used to propel an object such as a chock or ball towards some target or goal. Such modern games as field and ice hockey immediately spring to mind, games which bear a national tradition in various parts of the Soviet Union.

A prototype of contemporary football was popular in Russia and the Ukraine back in the seventeenth century. The game was called "flying ball", the ball itself being made of wool. A characteristic of this game was that the ball had to keep in the air and not touch the ground. In the mid-19th century, before modern football became circumscribed by rules and regulations, the writer N. G. Pomyalovsky was able to describe such a game, known then as *kila* (actually the name of the ball used), in his story *Ocherki bursy* (Notes of a Seminary):

> "On the left side of a yard, some eighty men play *kila*, which is a leather hair-filled ball the size of a man's head. Two sides come together wall-to-wall; one player kicks the ball, slowly pushing it forward with his feet; therein lies the supreme art of the game since a hard kick would send the ball into the opponents' half, the enemy camp, which would take possession of it. It is not permitted to trip an opponent: that might involve kicking his legs. It is forbidden to kick the ball from behind the line—that is, to run into the opponents' half for the ball and then run with it to a 'town' marked by a line. Anyone who breaks the rules has his neck soaped."

Ball hockey on ice used to be known quite recently as Russian hockey both within the USSR and abroad. Russians have enjoyed various ice games from time immemorial; they would take gnarled roots of trees and drive a wooden sphere (known

as a *kubar*) across the ice; initially the *kubar* was directed into holes cut in the ice rather than into goals. The game was variously called *yula, lunki, kaslo* and *kotel.*

Simultaneously with Russian hockey, another game—bandy—grew up in Britain, Holland, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. The only basic difference lay in some of the rules and the size of the hockey stick (it was bigger and heavier in Russian hockey). When in the 1950s the enthusiasts for both games agreed to play by common rules and hold the first ball ice hockey world championship, the superiority of Russian hockey won the day. Soviet teams have held the world title since 1957. Moreover, having taken up ice hockey with a puck just over thirty years ago, they have also dominated that world championship ever since they made their debut. Many moves and actions of ball and puck hockey are intervariable.

A game which goes by the title of *ritinys* enjoys popularity in Lithuania, particularly in the countryside. It has much in common with field hockey, although its sticks are more solid, almost straight, with a strong hitting surface and a grip end that is bent back. They play with a disk carved from wood rather like a hockey puck, but with a diameter twice as large and a weight of 600-700 gm. The game is played on a football pitch using football goals, with each team having seven players consisting of a goal-minder, three defenders and three attackers. Pressure on players is very great in that the play requires immense strength and stamina; for that reason playing time is shorter than in soccer or field hockey, with two periods of 25 minutes each. *Ritinys* is rather reminiscent of ancient European games with a stick and ball, especially hurling which still retains its popularity in Ireland.

Lithuania is reputed to be a land of strong, fearless characters tempered in contest with nature. Many of their diversions are therefore tests of strength like *ritinys.* The republic also has its own version of *lapta* or rounders—*muštukanys.* Timber felling is another sport of some renown in Lithuania, not unrelated to the lumberjack contests that are held at holiday times in North America. Yet another Lithuanian folk sport is horse-racing in special sulkies, reminiscent of the chariot-racing of antiquity.

Various genres of ice hockey, though minus ice skates, are known to the peoples of the extreme north-east of the USSR, as to the Eskimos of Alaska and Greenland. This hockey has no

hard and fast rules for size of rink; it may be as long as a kilometre. Nor is team size regulated except in regard to equal sides. Scores of 5-3 or even goalless draws are unheard of: as soon as one team scores a goal the game finishes. The goal counts when the ball—or rather the lump of frozen fat that serves as a ball—crosses one of the lateral lines of play. Sometimes the game ends after ten minutes or it may go on for hours throughout the Polar day. Another peculiarity of the game is that it dispenses with umpires: the players themselves resolve all problems that arise and stick rigidly to the rules of fair play. One other detail is worthy of mention: the hockey sticks are made from walrus tusks.

If we return to the south-west of the country, to the Ukraine, we find a great number of games and amusements that have been handed down over the years; their unique regulations and details testify to the mighty sources that nourished them and still help them to flourish today. The Ukraine naturally plays host to many sports, like *lapta*, that are common to all Slavs; all the same, it has a number of original Ukrainian games the like of which will not be found elsewhere. And many of the trials of strength and diversions of Ukrainian strongmen all bear the characteristic brand of native humour.

Although we shall not be dealing specifically with children's games, it is noteworthy that the numerous playground amusements often turn into little contests and encourage the development of valuable human qualities, such as strength, boldness, honesty, skill, speed and stamina. From ancient times children's games in the Ukraine have served as a source of popular sporting pastimes. An element of competition has invariably kept the games alive and many of these children's games are still widespread among young people of Ukrainian villages and towns.

The under-fives are very fond of a game known as *shvygalka*, particularly in the areas around Kiev, Chernigov and Poltava. A ball of pitch is stuck on the end of a long and flexible stick; with a strong toss the ball is hurled forward and up, depending on the rules of the game. Sometimes it is aimed at a target.

When children get older they may well take up another game, called *prashcha*: a belt with a "pocket" for a little stone is firmly wound around the arm from right to left or vice versa, depending on where the missile is to be aimed. And the children need no mean skill and accuracy to get the stone to fly

forward or vertically upwards. Sometimes a *prashcha* is made from wood: in the centre of a long wooden board a groove is made to hold a pebble or hard piece of earth. With a swing the pebble is sent rolling along the groove and flung with ever increasing velocity. These children's slings hark back to times gone by when such weapons were far from amusements, rather the constant companions of the Slav tribes in hunting and warfare.

Another children's amusement is walking on stilts. A copy of the *Kievskaya starina* of 1904 provides a detailed description of how to make a pair of stilts: "To two tall poles tie small sticks to each side or nail on little boards. Several of these may be attached either higher or lower. It is best to begin with low stilts and make the first steps from a fence or the wall of a house. The person who can stand on the highest stilts will enjoy a feeling of freedom and lightness as he strides above the heads of smiling grown-ups. Especially well-made and fancy stilts are to be found in Chigirin."

In regard to winter amusements, the Ukraine has been especially well served; pride of place must go to the old pastime of *krutilka.* A crowd of bold young men would make their way to a frozen pond and there make a hole in the ice into which they would thrust a thick tree trunk until it touched the bottom. A day or two later this stake would have frozen solid in the ice and a cartwheel would be placed firmly on it. Snow would be sprinkled liberally around it; then the entire contraption would be watered well and allowed to set solidly into ice. Long sticks with straps on the ends would then be fitted to the spokes of the wheel and a sledge fixed to each of these straps or loops. Children would then sit in the sledges while the others would turn the *krutilka.* When they became tired, the two teams would change places and a good time would be had by all. Incidentally, this was an amusement enjoyed as much by adults as by the children. This winter carousel was popular in the Ukraine a long, long time ago.

Ice toboggans or *gromak* were popular in Ukrainian villages: a large piece of ice would be hacked from a river or lake, and then hollowed out to take at least one person; a hole would be made in the nose for a rope and the *gromak* was ready to slide down slopes. Sometimes to reinforce the ice sled a layer of horse manure was applied in the hollow and watered to make a solid ice bed. Of course, it was much tougher to keep one's seat

on such a projectile, but people had great fun in demonstrating who was the cleverest in riding the ice.

Another variant of this popular pastime was known as the "pig-*gromak*": instead of a smooth piece of ice being cut from a river, people would carve out a piece in the shape of a pig—which demanded considerable art as a sculptor. The base was not as round as a pig's belly, otherwise it would not have stood up at all; and a rope or belt was fixed to the "snout". Sometimes the "pig-*gromak*" was huge enough for three people to take their seats, on occasions even five. Such comical toboggans were especially popular at Christmastide or the New Year.

The gulf between children's pastimes and adult entertainments was often very small, as the Ukrainian toboggans show. A second invariable source that nourished this particular branch of popular endeavour was social and ritual games. Having originated long before Christian times, the innumerable ritual games of Slav youth (that came to apply to Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Serbians, Bulgarians, Poles, Czechs and Slovaks) regularly took place during festivals. One of the most popular games was played on the night of Ivan Kupala.

Young lads would set up a wooden or straw idol known as "Ivan Kupala" on a river bank and make a bonfire over which people were to jump. The first to take their turn were the girls who would leap over the fire one at a time at the edges as the fire was not yet in full blaze. Then, as the fire got stronger, the youths would join the contest seeing who could jump the farthest and especially the highest. They would jump in twos and even threes firmly linking hands as they took a running jump. There then followed the general part of the game. Boys and girls would move lightly in a jinking chain around the bonfire and leap across while keeping on the move; by now the fire would be blazing merrily. It therefore took only the most experienced of jumpers to accomplish the feat.

The Ivan Kupala festival was originally a day of "great cleansing by fire". In time, however, it went the way of most festivals and completely lost its original ritualistic meaning. Nowadays we play the game without thought for its religious or pagan origins.

Such ritualistic games may be found today in many rural parts of the western Ukraine and particularly in the Transcarpathians.

Nearly every Guzul considers it an honour to take part in the axe-throwing game. This contest, which attracts young and old alike, is usually held in a clearing in which there is an old pine tree. Some two metres up the trunk is fixed a small board bearing a certain image and from 15-20 metres the Guzuls hurl their axes to try to "kill" (i.e., to cut off the head) the image or at least to hit the board. Children normally use traditional wooden choppers and the adults solid metal axes.

Various games of the tug-of-war variety find popularity in eastern and western Ukrainian villages right up to the present. One such game is known as *peretyazhka*: two teams are formed, one remaining in a barn, the other standing outside in the yard—the boundary between them being the threshold of the barn. The front members of each team take hold of a long and smooth pole which they strain to pull towards them, aided by team members who in turn pull those in front.

Another game in the same category is known as "pulling the beech": two people sit on the ground with the soles of their feet touching. They then take hold of a solid beech pole and pull; the laurels go to the person who not only pulls the pole to his side but jerks his opponent over to him as well.

A popular game among young girls was the *monetka* or "coin" contest: a person would stand in the middle of the cottage, then slowly and steadily bend backwards until, with two fingers, she could pick up a coin that lay on the floor alongside her heels.

The Code of Laws published during the reign of Peter the Great (1672-1725) tells us that the Russian Orthodox Church conducted a savage campaign against all manner of popular diversions, especially those that were regarded as a parody of church rituals. They were labelled as both pagan and diabolical. In spite of this persecution, games of all types continued to enjoy widespread popularity in Ukrainian life.

The training of strong and hardy soldiers was everywhere based on rigorous physical exercise; the Zaporozhye Cossacks were no exception. Bold and imaginative folk, they dedicated themselves body and soul to the defence of Ukrainian and Russian communities from the incursions by Turks and Tartars. Not infrequently the Cossacks would undertake campaigns to Turkish cities to free their captive brothers and sisters and to sow panic among their foes. They would often return home in glory with rich trophies from their daring exploits.

The daredevil courage of the Zaporozhye Cossacks is legendary. But their campaigns down the Dnieper River and across the Black Sea on their light skiffs known as "seagulls" would not have been possible without lengthy and varied preparation. The prime test of strength and training was the Dnieper Rapids. Every spring the Cossacks used to hold rowing competitions across (!) the turbulent river just above the rapids. The victor was the hardy Cossack whose skiff reached the other shore at a point directly opposite the starting post. It was also in these treacherous Dnieper waters that the Cossack youths would develop their health, strength and skill under the watchful eye of their elders. All this hardening was also promoted by hunting, fishing, swimming and the constant rowing competitions.

On some occasions, an elder would deliberately drop his *lyulka*—a long clay pipe—into the raging torrents and get young Cossacks to dive in and retrieve it from the river bed. It was considered of special merit to pick up the *lyulka* from the river bed without using the hands, but with the lips, and bring it up to the surface.

Finally, the most responsible test for young Cossacks was to cross the famous Dnieper Rapids: they had to guide their "seagulls" all the way through the thirteen treacherous rapids. Only then could they aspire to the title of a true Zaporozhye Cossack.

The Cossacks also were fond of shooting competitions: with bows, pistols and other firearms. The Cossacks were masters of wrestling, horse riding, fist-fighting and fencing.

A form of rounders, called *oina,* was popular in western Moldavia and even more so in parts of neighbouring Romania. This ancient game had once been a favourite pastime of the mountain shepherds. The ball used in *oina* is about the same size as a tennis ball and is made of sheep's wool; when struck by a bat of some 80 centimetres long the ball would fly as far as 60-70 metres. At the opposite end of the field the fielding team would be arranged so as to catch the ball and throw it at the running player, endeavouring to hit him on any point of the body except his arms. It would therefore be the task of the runner to shield his body with his arms when the ball was thrown.

A form of primitive tennis was known to the people of Estonia many centuries ago; thus, the popularity of the game in

Estonia today is very much based on its folk origins. Even now a type of "small tennis" is played in Estonia using simple plywood rackets and an ordinary rubber ball on a court measuring some 20 by 10 metres. The score is kept as in table tennis. One may assume that Estonia's reputation in the world of "big tennis" owes much to its people's long predilection for "small tennis". In this way the world of contemporary sport is nourished directly from age-old folk games and sports.

Here is another example. People of the northern Caspian and southern Urals have long practised various forms of horse riding and associated games. And the traditions live on, although now based on new soil. Thus, the Bashkirs have always had a reputation as skilled horsemen. In the old Russian Army, Bashkirs even formed special cavalry detachments and took part, for instance, in the war against Napoleon. Scientific progress, however, has given the Bashkirs a new "steel" horse—the motorcycle. Now, the once-famous Bashkir *djigits* are the best motorbike riders in the country and have won international crowns in the sport.

Equestrianism has long been popular among the Kalmyks as well; now they have swapped their saddles for motorcycles and become the world's No. 1 motoball team (the Kalmyk motoball team from Elista is currently world champions).

Evidently there is a link between old riding traditions and skill at the various motor sports. Motoball, for example, has many enthusiasts outside Kalmykia in the foothills of the northern Caucasus.

From the beginning of time man had to scratch a living from his surroundings: he hunted wild animals and birds, caught fish and, over the years, learned to build a habitation out of wood or stone by fashioning these materials for construction. All the time people tried to improve their work, whether in hunting, animal husbandry or construction. Songs and legends were composed in honour of the most clever and skilled hunters, fishermen, herders and woodcutters; they were accorded the greatest respect among their fellows. The most skilled at their trade have long taken part in traditional competitions during the folk festivals. Even today, when the machine is more and more taking over from human muscle, contests continue for the title of the best hunter, woodcutter, raftsman, fisherman and wild horse tamer.

Everyone knows of the famous rodeo shows staged in America. Many analogous competitions also take place over the length and breadth of the Soviet Union, wherever cattle breeding has traditionally sunk its roots: in Siberia, Central Asia, the Transcaucasus and the Soviet Far North.

Instead of bow and arrows or even a firearms, some peoples have traditionally gone hunting armed with special hurling missiles to bring down a bird or beast. The Aborigines of Australia, for example, use a boomerang which they sling skilfully in a given trajectory so that it returns to the feet of the hunter if it misses its mark. The Buryats of southern Siberia by Lake Baikal have a similar implement: a metal hunting weapon called a *bolu*. Nowadays, naturally the Buryat hunters have succumbed to more effective means of hunting, but the metal *bolu* is still used at folk festivals in Buryatia to demonstrate skill in throwing either for distance or for accuracy.

In the republics of Central Asia, falcon and golden eagle hunting is still common and sports contests known as *kus-salu* continue employing these birds.

Woodcutters in many countries are renowned for their professional rivalry in various contests: they rival each other in speed for shinning up a tree, for sawing or cutting it down, or for lopping off its branches. Inasmuch as forest covers as much as a third of the total land surface of the USSR, it is to be expected that the lumberjacks hold a rich variety of competitions up and down the country. And in the fast-flowing streams in the Carpathian Mountains along which the timber is floated, raft-steering contests have always been popular.

Over large areas of the Soviet Union the winter is severe and brings large falls of snow for six or more months of the year. In such circumstances, skis have long become an invaluable means of transport for every rural dweller, in particular the hunter. That is why the USSR has so many world and Olympic champions in skiing. Hundreds of years ago the Russian Army had its ski detachments which, for example, took part in defeating the Kazan Tatar Prince with the troops of Ivan the Terrible in the sixteenth century.

Skiing was also well known even in Central Asia.

The extent to which skiing as a form of transport was popular among the Turkic tribes populating Kazakhstan may be judged by the name given to them at that time by the Chinese: "Turks with wooden horses". The chronicles of the

famous Arabian historian of the 13th-14th centuries Rashid-ad-Din contain an excellent description of skis and methods for using them by the peoples of ancient Kazakhstan:

> "Since their country contains many mountains and forests and a large quantity of snow, they slay a great number of grouse in the snow. They make special boards which they call *chaneh* and stand upon them; they also make a bridle out of a strap and tie it to the front end of the board, then take hold of a stick and, sliding through the snow, push themselves along with the stick, just as if they were driving a boat through water. That is how they travel in their *chaneh* over the steppe and through valleys, down slopes and up hills, in pursuit of mountain oxen and other animals. Along with these same *chaneh* on which they travel themselves, they also pull others attached to them: on these they put the slain animals. Even when the load weighs as much as two or three thousand *mans*, it does not require much effort to drag it over the snow. If a person will not be skilled or experienced in this pursuit, his legs will slide apart and he will tumble down in the snow when he runs, especially on the slopes and on a fast run. But a tutored person can run with great alacrity. No man would credit it unless he sees it with his own eyes.
>
> "Word of this reached the noble ear of the great Lord of Islam, and he commanded a group of people from that land to be brought to him. They then travelled to him in the manner described here; and he was convinced of the veracity of the story."

Not every Kazakh possessed his own horse, so it was natural that running and walking should become popular. One of the most widespread races was that over rugged countryside at a distance of a "day's journey". This form of contest, which bore the name *jayau-jarys*, was known in Kazakhstan in ancient times; nowadays it has become a regular feature of sporting contests in cross-country running by age, sex and skill classification.

The Caucasus and Transcaucasus are particularly exotic parts of the Soviet Union. This vast area is one of the oldest sites of human culture and has its own honoured system of physical training, incorporating many games and exercises. The heyday of such amusements may be traced back to the reign of Queen Tamara (1184-1213). Warriors attained particular skill at fencing, ball games, horse riding contests, archery and special

gymnastics exercises known as *moshantoba*. Up until the mid-19th century, wooden sabre (*saldasti*) fighting was popular in the Caucasus. The Georgian fist-fighting known as *mushtiksrivi* had much in common with Russian pugilism, though it did have one especially unique Caucasian style called *hridoli* in which only one fist was used by each contestant.

The Caucasians were famed as horsemen and therefore developed a great number of equestrian sports, including several variants of polo—*tskhenburti* or *chogani* in Georgia, *chovgan* in Azerbaijan, *makanahakh* in Armenia. In the Middle Ages, Georgian experts at *chogani* emerged triumphant from contests with the renowned Iranian riders who were then thought to be the best in the world.

An even more popular Georgian game is *lelo*, with some similarity with modern rugby (in the Abkhazian part of Georgia, a version of the game is known as *aimtskachara*). In earlier times the *lelo* teams would consist of a few dozen players each and the field would sometimes be crossed by a stream which the players would have to ford in pursuit of the ball.

Nothing can match wrestling in the Caucasus for popularity; throughout the ages it has had its heroes. The shepherd Hintba Gdi who lived in the last century became a famous champion of the Abkhazian form of wrestling known as *ankupari*. He was credited with phenomenal strength: he could break a bull's neck with his bare hands. It is said that once, when his horse had broken its leg in the mountains, he carried it on his back all the way to his settlement. Hintba Gdi was never once beaten at an *ankupari* contest.

Chokit-tkhoma is a special form of pole vaulting in the mountainous regions of the Caucasus, particularly in Hevsuretia and Svanetia. But the manner of vaulting is not to achieve height, rather distance: in that way the vaulters were able to clear the fast-flowing mountain rivers and streams.

Raging mountain streams are crossed by rope in Tajikistan, lying along the high rocky southern border of the USSR. *Dorbazi* (tightrope walking with the aid of a balancing pole) is still popular in that republic and competitions in the art of tightrope walking draw many participants and spectators to the folk games festivals.

Feats of strength have always had many adherents among the common people. At the end of July 1907, virtually every Chicago newspaper carried news of a competition the like of

which had never before been seen in America. A strongman had appeared one evening in the city circus which was bursting at the seams. With a bow to the American public, this amazing man started his routine by entering a lion's cage. The huge lion roared and savagely set upon the bold intruder; but the man nimbly dodged the first attack and in turn launched himself at the enraged beast. After a fierce tussle, the man jerked the lion off its feet, lifted it above his head and hurled it with all his force upon the ground, so killing the beast.

The victor of this unique match, worthy of the mythical Heracles, was Terenty Koren, a circus strongman from the Ukraine. His fame quickly spread around the circus rings of Russia, America, Britain, Turkey, France and Germany, and sometime later in the 1920s he became one of the founders of the Soviet circus.

Koren was by no means the only famous strongman of those times. Undoubtedly the most renowned of all the world's strongmen was the great Russian wrestler Ivan Poddubny. But there were many others who approached him in strength and feats. Russian strongmen have a long tradition that goes way back into the folk past.

Back in the sixteenth century the Moscow Kremlin was the venue for a contest of strongmen to find the country's strongest man. Wrestling at that time was looked down on as only an amusement.

The strength and daring of Russians were sometimes tested in contests with wild bears. In order to enrage the bear, the wrestler would first poke the beast with a stick or horns; when the bear responded by rushing at his tormentor, the wrestler would get to grips with the bear and eventually finish the animal off with a knife. Such duels did not always end with human victory: the court records of the eleventh and twelfth centuries tell us that a bear had "won its contest" on some occasions with its challenger.

Strongmen were to be met everywhere, in Siberia, the Baltic regions and the Caucasus, where they performed at travelling fairs, show booths, village yards and squares. Often their fame would spread well beyond the locality in which they lived. The Volga boatman Nikita Lomovskoi was famed for his strength along the length and breadth of that great river. To give some idea of his phenomenal strength, suffice it to say that in Astrakhan he once thrust into the ground stakes for a dam and

knocked them in with an iron "mallet" that would have taken eight strong men to lift.

The Russian Navy well knew the legends of feats of strength demonstrated by Captain Lukin and Lieutenant-Captain Timashev. Lukin, who was dubbed the "Russian Hercules" could break horseshoes in two with ease, hold pood weights for a long time in outstretched hands and press nails into the ship's deck with his finger.

For a bet Timashev once carried a twenty-pood copper weight under his arm. Another sailor, a senior mate on an ocean-going ship, Pyotr Krylov, was also renowned in the last century as a strongman; his nickname was "King of the Weights". He would demonstrate his remarkable strength by lifting a platform holding a complete brass band 20 strong, cracking stones by his fist and raising a rod holding two swings on which two grown soldiers in uniform would be sitting.

Of course, strongmen's feats were not confined to the Russian nation; other nationalities that made up the Russian Empire had their strongmen whose names became world famous: the Pole Pytliasiński, the Latvian Krause, the Estonians Lurich, Aberg and Hackenschmidt, the Georgians Dadianidze and Maisuradze.

It is therefore hardly surprising that in recent years so many Olympic weightlifters have come from the Soviet Union, such as Yuri Vlasov, Leonid Zhabotinsky and Vasily Alexeyev. It is noteworthy that the current world superheavy Olympic weightlifting champion Alexeyev has lifted a weight of 256 kilos which established a new world record.

The world of folk sport is extremely rich and talented. It is the foundation of the skill and strength of all who take part in Olympic teams; it is, too, the source of a nation's health and prosperity as well as its sporting records.

SKILL, SPEED AND ACCURACY

LAPTA

Out of all the richness of contemporary world sports the Americans are said to give preference to the three "Bs": basketball, boxing and baseball. And if they would have to select just one sport as favourite, the choice would surely go to baseball.

And so it should be. After all, baseball is regarded in the United States of America as the national sport. Children are said to take it up almost before they can walk. The baseball bat and ball seem to attract young Americans like a magnet; wherever there is a patch of land or field children may be found hurling the hard white ball, striving to hit it out of sight, or running hard about the diamond, shouting, whistling, roaring their encouragement. Just how popular baseball has become may be seen from the published statistics: the number of spectators at baseball runs into eight figures!

But how many Americans know that their national game has a distant Russian relative. The Russian game of *lapta* also requires a bat and ball; the players have to run from "home" to "town" rather than from "base" to "base". The only major difference lies in the size and layout of the pitch or diamond: in *lapta* it is shaped like a rectangle whereas baseball has a rhombus-shaped pitch. Other bat and ball games are similar to *lapta*, such as the Finnish *pesäpallo* and the Romanian *oina*.

The Russian chronicles do not provide information on exactly who, when and where was responsible for shaping the first bat, drawing up the marker lines for the "home" or "town" bases. It is known, however, that during the reign of Peter the Great, *lapta* enjoyed as much popularity as the then renowned fist-fights. The game was played in the picturesque Russian woodland clearings and meadows as keen tests of skill, speed and accuracy.

With the passing of years *lapta* gradually lost its former popularity, though it did not vanish altogether. Nowadays it is normally played only by children. For grown-ups, it is but a

happy reminder of childhood. A whole host of outstanding sportsmen found their way into big-time sport through *lapta*. The Soviet volleyball champion Vladimir Shchagin has written that "There were always games of one sort or another going on in my backyard when I was a boy. I recall taking up *lapta* with great enthusiasm; it's such a wonderfully vigorous game. Whoever has played the game knows how much speed and skill you need to dodge a flying ball and what a keen eye you need to hit an opponent in full flight."

Thanks to the efforts of its fans, this grand old Russian folk game has at last experienced a new lease of life. It has even earned the right to its own association and inclusion in the Soviet sports classification alongside such sports as athletics, football, volleyball, basketball and *gorodki*. Uniform rules of play have been drawn up and agreed upon, and in 1958 the first Russian Federation *Lapta* Championship was held.

The Second Summer Spartakiad of the Russian Federation marked a new stage in the annals of *lapta* by including the game in its programme as a compulsory sport. Leningrad, which played host to the Spartakiad finals, will long remember the keen games played by the experts; these games excited a great deal of interest and enthusiasm among spectators, certainly no less than football and other better known sporting encounters.

The main outcome of the *lapta* championship was not so much its technical results as the rebuff it gave to the sceptics who had refused to believe in a resurgence of interest in the old Russian folk sport. The game's exponents displayed such excellent physical and mental fitness, such strong and accurate striking of the ball, skilful running and dodging that no one was left in any doubt that the game will long continue to attract both players and spectators alike.

Now to a more detailed description of *lapta*. The game is played in a rectangle measuring 60 by 35 metres, although a smaller pitch is used by 13-14 year olds (40 by 25 metres). The long lines that mark out the field of play are known as the sidelines, while the shorter lines mark out the area of the "home" base or the "town". A line is also drawn 15 metres (10 for children) from the "town" base and parallel with it; this is known as the penalty area. The "town" base line is divided into three unequal sections with the areas behind each known consecutively as the "waiting" sector, the "serving" sector and

the "town outskirts" sector. It is desirable to play the game in a field covered in closely cropped grass, thereby preventing serious accidents from hard falls, pulled muscles or ligaments.

The implements are relatively easy to make: the principal weapon is a bat, or *lapta* as it is known in Russian. This is made from any hard wood (maple, birch or ash) and should measure between one and 1.2 metres long and 4 centimetres in diameter. Children play as a rule with a flat *lapta* measuring up to 80 cm in length, 8 cm in width and 2 cm in thickness. The usual *lapta* ball is a simple tennis ball. All the players need to wear are shirt, shorts and either tennis or basketball shoes.

The game is relatively simple. The aim is to make as many points as possible during the 60-minute duration of the game (two halves of 30 minutes with a ten-minute interval); points are scored by completing a run from the "town" to the "home" base and back; each complete run brings one point. The teams consist of eight players, including two substitutes who can be brought on at any point in the game for other players, and then can be brought off again if so desired. If during the course of the game only four players are left in the batting side, the game stops and that side is considered defeated. The teams toss a coin to decide who bats and who fields. Players of the batting side then line up behind the line of the "town" base, while the fielders take their places in the field. At the referee's whistle, the batsmen each take their place at the batting crease, one after another in batting order, and hit the ball as far as they can. If any player mishits, his place is taken by the next man. After a successful hit, the batsman and his team-mates who have already had their turn and are standing in the "town outskirts" sector have to try to make a run to the "home" base and, if possible, back again without being hit on the body by the ball. Each player who completes a full run gains a point for his team and has the right to bat again.

The fielders in turn are placed strategically about the playing area and have to do all they can to catch the ball in flight or, having fielded it, to throw it and hit a runner. If they succeed, "the town is captured" and the teams change places: the fielding side goes into bat. It thus becomes a matter of trying to remain in the "town" for as long as possible.

It may well sound quite simple to play the game of *lapta*. In actual fact, it requires a good deal of training and an ability to

work out the right tactical orientation during the game's progress. Players have to be very quick to cover the full 120 metres so as to score a run. They have to prevent their opponents from "greasing" or "tarring" them—i. e., hitting their body with the ball. In so doing, the runners have to take evasive action by stopping, checking, jinking, dodging and so on. On the other hand, the fielders have a lot of work to do: they must be skilful, cunning, accurate in throwing and passing the ball, and dead on target in picking off the running batsman.

It would therefore be apparent that *lapta* is an extremely skilful game and players ideally should have the speed of a sprinter, the balance of an acrobat, the accuracy of a sniper and the stamina of a long distance runner. After sixty minutes of constant movement only a superbly fit and versatile sportsmen can keep up the pace.

Now let us illustrate the above description of the rules by a practical example.

Let us imagine that the referee and his linesman have taken the field. The linesman's responsibility is to move along the sidelines and to make sure that players are abiding by the rules; if he spots an infringement he will signal it immediately to the referee. Naturally enough, the official on the field of play has wider powers to spot and punish the slightest infringement that occurs during the course of the game. His decision is final and cannot be challenged.

The toss is made and choice of innings decided. The batting side takes its place behind the line of the "town" base, and the opposing team takes its place in the field. One fielder stands in the "serving" sector on his captain's orders; his job is to throw the ball up for the batsman.

According to the rules the batsman and the server must have both feet within the "serving" sector as the ball is thrown. The serving player may be any distance from the batsman as long as he stands within the sector; he has to throw the ball underarm so that the batsman can hit it properly. Do not imagine that he can somehow aid his team-mates by delivering a poor serve on purpose: *lapta* is a game of a high standard of fair play and if the server were to serve badly he would be breaking the rules. On the other hand, the batsman has the option of refusing to take a serve. If a serving player does throw the ball incorrectly to the batsman, he may be spoken to on the first occasion,

warned on the second and his team punished by forfeiting a run on each successive improper throw.

Each game usually begins with a batsman hitting the ball: the server throws the ball underarm with open hand to the first batsman to hit. The whistle now sounds and the batsman takes an enormous swing and misses the ball altogether! He then retires behind the line of the "town outskirts" sector and waits until one of his team-mates gives the ball a solid strike before he can try to make a run. Otherwise he must stay put.

Now the second batsman steps up to take his turn; and he too fails to make contact with the ball. So he retires behind the "town outskirts" line, thus joining his first team-mate in waiting for a successful strike.

It should be mentioned at this point that in *lapta* not all strikes are counted: the rules state that a hit is only counted if the ball goes beyond the "town" but does not cross the sidelines before touching the ground, or if it does not go outside the field boundaries marked by the side flags.

At last a strike is made. The ball soars high, wide and handsome some forty metres from the "town". Instantly, the batsmen set off across the field and are half way across when the whistle goes: they have to return because the batsman has dropped his bat in the field, and that is against the rules. He must leave the *lapta* within the confines of the "serving" sector. The referee rightly adjudges the hit to be a non-run.

Now it is the turn of the fourth batsman. The three unsuccessful batsmen look at him with hope. This time bat meets ball with a clean whack and the ball sails high into the field, landing just inside the boundary and rolling beyond the sidelines. As the fielders rush after it, the batsmen rush from the "town outskirts" sector and make for the "home" base. One of them is faster than the others and has arrived at the "home" base and turns to make for the "town". Is he not in danger of being "run out", since the ball is already in the hands of the fielders? They throw it accurately to one another, taking their time, waiting for the best moment to intercept the runner. However, at the last moment, one of the fielders fumbles the ball, drops it and the runner is able to scamper "home"; he is now safe back behind the "town" line. He thereby brings his team one point and gains himself the right to another hit.

In the meantime, his team-mates have seen that the ball is in the hands of the fielders and decide not to risk a return run

from the "home" base: they wait their chance to make a safe run back to base.

The score is now 1-0 in favour of the Blues.

If the next batsman is now able to make a good hit and the other two batsmen stationed at the "home" base can get safely back to the "town", then the Blues will have another two points.

The spectators feel the tension rising; their eyes are on the incoming batsman who is facing up to the server. This time the batsman overreaches himself and mishits. All is not lost: there is still batsman No. 6 as well as the first batsman who has made it back to base.

The sixth batsman is usually the best in the team. So he comes into bat unhurriedly, takes aim and sends the ball like a rocket far into the field. The happy striker gallops off for the "home" base while his two team-mates come rushing towards him from the other direction. One of them evidently fears that he will be "tarred" and so keeps closely to the sidelines; he is taking a risk, for if he steps on or over the line he will be judged to have "tarred himself". In that case, the player with the ball has the right to hurl it far into the field and, together with his team-mates, he can run to either the "home" or the "town" base. This situation is known in *lapta* as a change-round: the fieldsmen become the batsmen, and the batsmen, if they do not gather the ball quickly enough to "tar" their opponent and evade him, become the fielders.

But the game is halted by the referee's blast on his whistle: the ball has gone out of play and the batsmen can complete their run safely in their own time. The fielders can retrieve the ball only when all the batsmen have reached the "town" sector.

The score is now 3-0.

The batsmen only manage two more hits before a change-round takes place, as a runner is struck by a well-aimed ball.

Each match is adjudicated by three officials: the referee, a linesman and a secretary. The senior official is, of course, the referee on the field of play. He starts his official duties the moment he whistles the sides onto the field of play. During the game, he stands close to the "town" marker line, while his assistant stands on the opposite side of the field of play. This positioning is important because the main umpire has to have a good view of the batsman, to make sure that he hits the ball in the correct manner, that he does not start his run too soon, that

all players observe the regulations. When a run is being made the referee must once again have an uninterrupted view of the runner, particularly to ensure that no runner touches the sidelines.

The secretary is a sort of scorer: from the record he keeps it is easy to keep track on the players—who is the best hitter and who is the least successful, who is the fastest runner from the "town" to the "home" bases and back. He is also responsible for time keeping and scoring, for seeing that the batsmen keep the right order of innings, and so on.

The match is now drawing to a close. The match official is frequently glancing at his watch and, at last, he gives a long blast on his whistle and the game is over.

Victory normally goes to the side which plays well together and uses a variety of tactical manoeuvres, such as precise passing of the ball, strong strikes and accurate throwing at the running batsmen. At the turn of the century, the famous Russian writer Alexander Kuprin summed up the essence of the game most succinctly when he said that "In *lapta* you need inventiveness, a good lung capacity, loyalty to your side, attentiveness, agility, fast running, a keen eye, a hardness of arm throw and an eternal confidence that you won't be beaten.... The game has no place for the slothful and the faint-hearted. I assiduously recommend this native Russian game not only as mechanical movement, but as a fascinating pastime which develops the best feelings of companionship and helping one another."

GORODKI

Gorodki squares are to be found all over the Soviet Union: from Moscow to Kamchatka, from Novgorod to Suzdal, from Kuban to Siberia. The years roll by, fashions and epochs come and go, TV screens bring us closer to the fiercest ice hockey clashes and introduce us to the wonderful world of figure skating, yet *gorodki* has continued to hold its own with many millions of people, even extending its attraction with every passing year.

More than half a century ago—on 20 August 1923—the very first official rules for the game of *gorodki* were ratified in the USSR. That day has gone down as the official birth of Soviet *gorodki*. It is, of course, a milestone in the history of the game,

but *gorodki*'s roots go deep into the past, into one of the favourite pastimes of the Russian people.

What then is the essence of *gorodki*?

The game consists of the following. The below-mentioned configurations are set up within a square on any even ground in the following order:

1. Cannon
2. Star
3. Well
4. Artillery
5. Machine Gun
6. Watchman
7. Shooting Gallery
8. Fork
9. Arrow
10. Crank Shaft
11. Racket
12. Lobster
13. Sickle
14. Aeroplane
15. Letter

Each figure is made up of five short pieces of wood known as *gorodki*; they measure 200 mm in length and 45-50 mm in diameter. These fifteen configurations comprise one game. The player tries to knock down the configuration with an ironbound pole of no more than a metre in length and 30-36 mm in diameter. Each player is supposed to have two such wooden poles. If the *gorod* or "town" holds all five *gorodki*, then the player has to throw from the farthest, principal throwing line. After knocking one or a few *gorodki* out of the square, the player is permitted to come closer to the square—to the halfway line. The only exception is when he reaches the final configuration—the "letter"—when he has to knock all five *gorodki* out of the square only from the distant throwing line. With his first throw he is to knock out the central *gorodok*, and then proceed to remove the corner *gorodki* that remain.

It is difficult to find anything analogous to *gorodki* in the games known in the West. Both the implement used to knock out the configurations (the pole) and the pieces of wood or *gorodki* themselves are entirely original sporting equipment unknown anywhere else in the world. There are some parallels with the game of bowling or skittles, with cricket where the ball

has to break a wicket (this may be compared to the *gorodki* configuration breaking), and with curling or the German game of *Eisschiessen* in which an object is rolled along the ice at a particular target.

The State Russian Museum in Leningrad contains a monumental sculpture by A. A. Ivanov called "Playing *Gorodki*", created in 1839. The artist has caught the athletic, powerful young man at the moment of hurling the pole. The grace, beauty, strength and concentration have been embodied by the sculptor with inimitable mastery. The young man stands bare to the elements showing the strong line of his muscles, the splendid proportions of his body and a dazzling white cloak hanging loose from his hip; all this gives the statue a semblance to the statues of athletes of Ancient Greece. The creator of the statue clearly intended, in the fashion of the time, to draw attention to the wide communality of *gorodki* as a significant phenomenon in the life of the ordinary Russian folk.

A. A. Ivanov wrote to his friend, the journalist N. A. Korovin, "I am frankly pleased with my success, doubly pleased because I have drawn attention to *gorodki*—the most ancient of our folk games so full of incomparable fun and enjoyment."

The sculptor was well known for his erudition and profound knowledge of the history of his people; in his work he somehow tried to confirm to us in documentary form that *gorodki* as a primitive form of physical exercise and a favourite game of the people had its beginnings in a time separated from us by at least several centuries. Other testimonies by historians may be cited too. In a number of works dedicated to Peter the Great, it is recorded that *gorodki* was one of his favourite pastimes. This became so well documented that when the Soviet writer Alexei Tolstoy wrote his historical novel *Peter the First*, he noted down in one of his early drafts: "Unusual breadth of diversions. *Gorodki*—the favourite game of a Russian autocrat?! Search for suitable opponents..."

Here is the account of the great Russian general of the eighteenth century, Alexander Suvorov (who, incidentally, regarded himself as a passionate enthusiast of *gorodki*): "The game of *gorodki* develops a keen eye, speed and thrust. You need a keen eye to line up the target, speed to hurl the pole and firm thrust to knock down the sticks." Suvorov eagerly spent his leisure hours in *gorodki* and encouraged the game among the Russian soldiery. It was largely under his prompting

that *gorodki* began to make appreciable inroads into the amusements of the Russian armyman; it was not long before the game became one of the most popular and enjoyed pastimes of the day in the Russian Army.

In his epic novel *War and Peace*, Lev Tolstoy describing the life of the Russian soldiers, mentions *gorodki* among their diversions.

The eminent Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov used to refer to *gorodki* as that "wonderful Russian game". Though it came into existence many centuries ago and has had to put up with rivalry from newer and classical sports, it has never lost its popularity. In the early part of this century, the magazine *Russky sport* wrote that "we have a game which has truly acquired nationwide popularity. Although no one has taken it upon himself to popularise the game or has bothered to produce equipment for it, its number of enthusiasts constantly grows. You may meet them among representatives of all sections of Russian society. The name of the game is *gorodki*".

And indeed, the game does number among its devoted followers ordinary workingmen who find in *gorodki* great enjoyment and relaxation, large numbers of students and very many great people in Russia's past, such as the writers Lev Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky and Alexander Kuprin, the painter Ilya Repin, the great Russian singer Fyodor Chaliapin. It is recorded that *gorodki* was also a fond pastime of the founder of the Soviet state, Vladimir Lenin. According to eyewitnesses, Lenin was a very skilled *gorodki* exponent, playing with gay abandon and youthful zeal. He was also an advocate of the game's widespread popularity since it was so useful and accessible to the common people in town and country.

During the long years of the game's existence, many changes have occurred in the mode of playing and the conventions. The rules have altered, as, too, have the form and dimensions of the playing area (the *gorod*), the throwing pole and the nature and form of the configurations. As an example, although such names as sickle, well and lobster have kept their place in the lexicon of the game, such ancient names as salami and haywain have been replaced by other, more up-to-date names such as crank shaft and aeroplane.

When we turn to the past, we find that our ancestors interpreted the rules in a different way and often had different names for the game itself.

In all likelihood the game of *gorodki* got its name in antiquity from the measures used in it in the form of closed circles and squares—i.e., "towns" (*gorod* in Russian) in which the enemy had dug himself in. The purpose of the game was therefore to drive him out of his fortified town.

For many years *gorodki* remained a purely local entertainment with its own rules set for that particular geographical area. However, gradually the reputation of the best *gorodki* players began to spread to neighbouring provinces and a general desire arose to arrange meetings to find the very best *gorodoshnik*. The time eventually arrived when such a championship was held, the venue being the famous Nizhny Novgorod Fair at which all the best teams from Russian cities assembled. Contests among the best players who had come to the banks of the Volga to measure their skill and strength became one of the brightest features of these famous folk festivals and attracted enormous crowds.

As soon as they caught sight of the *gorodoshniks*, crowds of little boys would scurry about to find the most suitable pitch, shrieking and calling,

"The *gorodoshniks* are coming to burn down the town!"

"At that cry," recalls the Nizhny Novgorod journalist G. Lyubimov in his *Notes*, "everything came to a halt. Traders with baskets rushed from their stalls, and hawkers willingly joined the throng to clear a place for the game. Trading came to a stop temporarily, the seething, jostling crowds bent their efforts to helping prepare the ground for *gorodki*, and the whole market surged into the central square to watch their favourite amusement, to acclaim the art of the players, to generously greet the winners."

After the October Revolution of 1917, the whole position of organised sport in the country radically changed and national folk games came into their own. Thus, *gorodki* as a truly folk game, took its place as a firm favourite among all the many and varied sports practised in the Soviet Union.

Much of the early success in establishing *gorodki* as a national sport right from the early years of Soviet development is due to the tireless efforts of Sergei Sysoev—sportsman, coach and educationalist.

The names of the footballing brothers Sysoev became well known in the first quarter of this century; they played for the Moscow club ZKS, then for a Moscow and national team and

for their country. The first to make a name for himself was Valentin Sysoev who had become one of Russia's best forwards and regular goalscorers. Then came the middle brother Vladimir who also represented his country; and last of all came the youngest brother Sergei.

Sportsmen of the older generation who knew Sergei Sysoev personally invariably recall not only his exceptional skills and his tactical flair, that was so rare for those years, but also his extensive sporting, cultural and educational interests. While continuing his footballing career, Sergei Sysoev engaged in extensive educational and organising work. He was, for example, the author of the first Soviet football manuals and one of the founders of Soviet basketball—a game that was little known to the Moscow public in the early 1920s.

At the same time, he took it upon himself to propagate *gorodki*, a task that earned him fame as a founder of the Soviet school of *gorodki*. Being himself a great devotee and master of the game, Sysoev systematised all the best in *gorodki* that its exponents had developed throughout its history; and he drew up the first Uniform Rules for the Game of *Gorodki* in the whole history of Russia; these were ratified on 20 August, 1923 by the Supreme Council of Physical Culture under the Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR.

"We must do all in our power," he wrote in an article devoted to publication of the new rules, "to make *gorodki*, this splendid invention of our people, serve from now on to help cultivate physical stamina, good health and, in the final count, communist education in the working people of our country."

And this dream became a reality. All over the country, especially in the big Russian cities, *gorodki* teams began to be formed at every mine and mill, factory and trade union club.

The first National Trade Union Festival was held in the USSR in 1925; its extensive programme of sport included, of course, the game of *gorodki*. This was the very first time that the old folk game had featured in a big sports stadium and taken its place officially alongside the better known and universal sports. The Moscow papers and magazines wrote with great interest about the *gorodoshniks* and their tournament, and inscribed their names alongside those of more established sports stars of football, swimming and athletics in the sports columns. All this was bound to give *gorodki* an enormous boost and five

months later the major sports periodical *Krasny sport* was able to record the following:

> "We are pleased to note that *gorodki* which for long we regarded as nothing more than a pastime has become so popular and earned its place as a real sport enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of people."

And rightly so. When the first All-Union Spartakiad took place in the USSR in 1928, *gorodki* was included on the basis of two of its most ambitious tournaments: the Russian Federation Championships and the Championships of Union Republics. As many as ten representative teams from various geographical regions of Russia took part in the former. The tournament was fiercely fought out and attracted many thousands of spectators; it ended in victory for the Moscow team. The latter tournament was disputed by representative sides from the Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic, Turkmenia, Byelorussia and the Ukraine. The two last-named teams came together in the final and, after many hours of competition, the Ukrainian *gorodoshniks* won the day with a score of 2-1.

The holding of *gorodki* competitions at the All-Union Spartakiad as a fully-fledged sport did more than anything to boost the sport's popularity. Countless *gorodki* sections sprang up in factories up and down the country, as at Moscow's *Tryokhgornaya manufaktura* textile mill and the Hammer and Sickle works, at several of Leningrad's biggest industrial concerns, and at factories in the Urals, Siberia, the Soviet Far East, Far North and the South. The individual skill, techniques and tactics also began to improve. Lovers of the game undertook an advertising campaign among the public; thus, for example, *gorodoshniks* from the two above-mentioned Moscow factories went off on display tours round the country and inspired mass tournaments wherever they went.

During the 1930s, city matches were held, particularly between teams representing Moscow and Leningrad and some of the other big cities. Furthermore, a competition took place for the best fifty of the country's largest factory teams. Finally, in 1936 the flag was run up for the first national championship in the history of the Soviet Union. The first man to win the coveted title of champion of champions was a Moscow blacksmith, Timofei Yermilov, now a Merited Master of Sport at *gorodki*. He repeated his success in 1938, but two years later a

new champion appeared—Semyon Gromov. Immediately after the war *gorodki* championships began to be held annually, as they are right up to the present. Similarly, championships for the Russian Federation and other republics became regular features of the country's sports programme, and *gorodki* matches were included in virtually all Spartakiads of the Russian Federation.

Somewhat in the region of a million people are currently playing the game of *gorodki* in the Soviet Union. It is a sporting army that is constantly replenishing its ranks and conscripting people of the most varied backgrounds and ages. It is no secret that it is most of all a workingman's sport. All the same, the leading exponents contain a fair sprinkling of artists and airmen, students and professors, construction workers and collective farmers. Virtually anyone can be found on the *gorodki* court.

There is no doubt that *gorodki* will continue to be a sport for all ages; today some of the best city teams contain both teenagers and pensioners.

To some people *gorodki* seems to be no more than an artless physical entertainment; but they are very much mistaken. It is true that the rules of play are relatively simple. Anyone can learn them quickly and go out and play; but the game may be played at two levels—as pure entertainment or as a game of superb skill, of extreme effort, immense psychological concentration and unsurpassed attraction. The sport has many times surprised its followers by its amazing records and the host of great sportsmen it has produced.

The first Merited Master of Sport title (the country's highest sporting honour) in *gorodki* went to the above-mentioned Semyon Gromov who began his working career at the AMO Motor Works which today bears the name of one of its early managers, Ivan Likhachov. Gromov worked his way up from apprentice to top-grade fitter and leader of a communist labour brigade. He applied his work skills of precision, care and consistency to the sport of *gorodki*, and was a delight to watch at the game: a tall slim handsome figure with his own throwing style. He was regarded as a superb technician and unmatched master of the game. He had the rare knack of putting a great deal of wrist flick into his throws and was always reckoned to be able to despatch a broken configuration out of the square from the half-way mark. It sometimes seemed that he would not be

able to account for all the "skittles" with one throw: after all, the pole is only a metre long, and the skittles would be strewn far and wide over the square. And then Gromov would step up unhurriedly and gracefully, take careful aim and throw... the pole would whirl through the air and knock every single skittle flying.

Gromov had many promising pupils, including Pyotr Strokov, a player of rare skill, precision and unruffled calm. Like Gromov, he attained the top title of Merited Master of Sport.

Such examples are too numerous to mention. One thing stands out: it would seem that *gorodki* attracts people of exceptional sporting skill and, at the same time, of pride in their work and a high sense of civic responsibility. There is a reason for this. A distinguishing feature of the game is its ability to instil in players not merely strength, agility and stamina, but such deeply respected qualities as modesty, precision, consistency and calm reflection. More than that: it is a game in which old and young are able to mingle and teach one another.

Now let us deal specifically with some of the details of playing. By contrast with many sports, *gorodki* has no time limit. A game may take an hour, an hour and a half or even longer—as long, in fact, as configurations remain to be hit. In individual matches, the winner is determined by the outcome of six games—i.e., the person who first accounts for 90 configurations. This regulation is frequently known as the "*gorodki* marathon". And there is no doubt that the contest really does require marathon stamina, poise and Olympic calm.

The confined conditions and precise regulations have made *gorodki* probably the only game in which records are registered—i.e., it is officially recorded who has used least hits in accounting for the 90 configurations. Minor records are also counted for 15, 30 and 60 configurations. What type of records have been registered?

In the mid-1950s, the country's principal record-holder was Alexander Bogdanov who had 142 throws for 90 configurations to his credit. Bogdanov was only 22 when he first earned the title of Soviet champion, and he held it for five years in a row (1952-56). He nowadays works as an engineer, though spends much of his spare time as ever on the *gorodki* court.

Victor Dudakov, a Moscow fitter, improved Bogdanov's record during the Moscow championships and was the first

mark to break the 140 barrier: the new record was 139 throws for the 90 configurations. And then Victor Stashinsky brought the record down to 136 throws, which Stanislav Kharitonov broke in 1959 at the Soviet championships in Penza, setting a new mark of 134.

And then there came one of those technical revolutions that occur now and then in the history of sports. In 1959, *gorodoshniks* of the Moscow Likhachov Motor Works, led by Semyon Gromov, tried out a new cast-iron surface for the *gorodki* square to replace the concrete one. The experiment proved a success and the new invention was officially accepted. Thus, when the national championships took place in the Siberian town of Omsk in 1960, the game was played on surfaces made of cast iron. And the results of this memorable tournament exceeded all expectations. Igor Yakubov of the Moscow Dynamo Club shattered every record in sight: 18 throws for 15 configurations, 38 for 30, 78 for 60 and the amazing record of 124 for 90.

At the time all the sages and pundits were amazed; they were certain that Yakubov had set a ceiling that could never be reached again, that this was the supreme attainment possible in *gorodki.* And yet along came Alexander Shpilev the very next year to record a 123 hit, while Anatoly Ryabtsev improved the record even further in 1964 to 122.

Besides individual championships, *gorodki* also has its team meetings. A team normally consists of five persons, and each team member has his throwing order number (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5). The two sides toss up before each game to decide who is to throw first. After ten throws, the first team retires and the second side takes its ten throws. This continues with the teams alternating their ten throws until one side completes the game. A draw may be the final outcome if both teams use the same number of throws to complete the game.

How great a physical strain the game is may be appreciated when it is reckoned that a player has to throw a total of some 500 kilos during a game and training session. If we then add all the bending, turning, swinging, etc., that a player has to do during the course of a single game, it is not hard to realise that the game of *gorodki* is one of the best exercises for stamina of all sports. The great Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov once declared that "our Russian *gorodki* is a wonderful, hundred times valuable game. How I wish that more people would take

up the game for it gives them the most valuable, the most important of all wealth—good health".

The ancient yet evergreen folk game of *gorodki* truly is magnificent and rich. It attracts both participants and spectators alike and holds them in its spell. Tens of thousands of spectators come to watch the game wherever it is held. The game draws in the crowds because quite simply it is unique and contains all that is fair and honest in the best sporting traditions.

ANCIENT AND MODERN

Midnight at the lower reaches of the River Pechora inside the Arctic Circle. Night here is a relative term: the golden sun still hangs in the sky and only the abundant dew upon the grass is witness to the end of another summer day and a signal to rest.

These lands on the shores of the Kara and Barents seas are inhabited by various peoples of the Far North, including the Nenets and the Komi. It was not so long ago, at the turn of the century, that they were still living in primitive tribal communities. The hunters and reindeer herders, with no written language, had roamed the boundless expanses of the land for centuries, deprived of elementary medical aid and eking out a pitiful existence right up to 1917. After the Revolution, they made immense strides forward in historical development having become fully-fledged participants in the new socialist community of nations. For the first time they acquired their own statehood and, in a brief span, produced talented scholars, teachers, doctors and specialists in other branches of knowledge.

A visitor to these parts is immediately struck by the rugged beauty of the land and its boundless expanses. The local terrain is not exactly teeming with life and colour; you have to observe closely to pick out some characteristic details. Take, for instance, Naryan-Mar, capital of the Nenets National Area. The town is not very big, containing some 18,000 inhabitants; and it does not take more than an hour to walk right through it from one end to the other. What is it that gives the town its particular northern flavour? First of all there are the wooden houses with their carved sharp-angled roofs rather reminiscent of Nenets nomadic tents. Then there are the hordes of dogs on the streets, looking malevolent but in fact some of the friendliest creatures around and certainly a boon to man in his age-old tussle with the elements.

Such are the external features of this northerly outpost. And yet at every step the visitor finds signs of the new way of life. It

is hard to credit that this was a half-savage country not so many decades past. Nowadays the shops are full of modern commodities like television sets, boat engines, musical instruments, household utensils and the latest clothes fashions. In the evening the local teenagers gather in the municipal House of Culture—as chic, vibrant, curious as youngsters anywhere else in the world. These young people are electricians, telegraph operators, laboratory workers, stevedores, schoolteachers, fishermen and aircraft servicers; many of them are the sons and daughters of reindeer herders. The visitor is bound to wonder whether, in making the transition to the new way of life, they lose touch with the customs and culture of the bulk of the Nenets nationality. The answer to that is somewhat unexpected when we take a look at how they spend their spare time. This same Naryan-Mar is famous not only for its administrative and economic functions; it is also the location for the national folk games which take place at regular intervals. In other words, it is a sort of northern Olympic capital. These meetings have been going on since August 1960 when Salehard played host to teams from various national areas of the Far North in order to decide championships in a whole host of native sports. Ever since these matches have become a regular fixture.

The match programme for national sports is diverse, including *tynzei* throwing for distance and accuracy (the *tynzei* is a form of lasso for catching reindeer). Athletes also compete in the standing triple jump, axe hurling and sledge jumping. An absolute champion is decided—a victor laudorum—in a variety of different games.

These are certainly sports that are unusual for the European areas of the Soviet Union. But they suit the local populace and have done so for centuries; they also provide an opportunity for young people of the diverse nationalities to assemble, commune and exchange experience. Participants in these matches come from such remote parts as the Taimyr, Evenk, Yamalo-Nenets, Khanti-Mansi and Nenets national areas. It is noteworthy that the team from Yamalo-Nenets National Area won the absolute championships seven out of eleven times, and the Nenets Area team the remaining four times.

As anywhere in the world the young people of the North love these trials of strength, skill and daring.

When we take a closer look at these local national sports, we see two peculiarities that at once strike the eye. First is their peaceful nature. Combative sports are utterly absent; no fencing, shooting, horse riding contests. Why exactly should this be? No categorical reason can be given, but it would seem reasonable to assume that the surrounding environment is so inclement and requires so much effort from human beings just to make a living that no time was left for the sort of internecine strife common to Europe. The widely popular physical exercises have a clearly-defined tendency towards diversions based on everyday life and work.

The climatic conditions in the northern parts of the Soviet Union are exceedingly severe. They breed a certain ruggedness in people that comes out in the character of their games and in their personalities. The treeless tundra stretches endlessly all the way to the horizon; only here and there is the undulating land covered with stubbly shrub or stunted trees. The great rivers carry their waters to the Northern Arctic Ocean; and the wild winds sweep across the land unhindered by forests or hills: the piercing wind burns the cheeks and freezes the nostrils. As if the remoteness and the rigours of the climate are not enough to contend with, permafrost multiplies the difficulties and costs in terms of human endeavour: much of the land sits on a crust of ice, frozen bog, soil, gravel and rock—a crust with a maximum frost depth of 1,500 metres in the north-west of Siberia and an average depth of 320 metres. It is hard to conceive of the ferocious climatic conditions which froze the earth to such a depth—froze it so thoroughly that it still remains at a constant temperature of minus 4° C.

Savage nature has engendered a severe way of life. For thousands of miles across this vast expanse there are no roads, no railways, not even dirt tracks. All the same, the teeming, raging twentieth century has made some inroads into Siberia: populous industrial cities have sprung up in the tundra and taiga; tireless aircraft wing their way across the barren steppe; helicopters land in hitherto inaccessible tundra settlements; electric power, radio and television have come to even the remotest homes of Siberia. Still today, however, the summer ground conditions make it impossible for any transport to cross much of the land; only in winter is it possible to lay highways—so-called "winter roads"—over the frozen land until

they come up against the snow projections. So flying is the only way to get about.

Aviation is, of course, extremely useful for communicating between the towns and settlements. But what if you want to ride around a herd of reindeer? Or if you want to get in touch with the nearest neighbour who lives a good fifty miles away? Now, as hundreds of years ago, the reindeer-drawn sledge comes into its own. These hardy horned beasts have no need of highways; they rush like the wind, breasting aside the shrubs, striding over pools and eddies. But the passenger has to hang on for dear life as the sledge rocks and tilts on its way. He has little choice, for this is the only means of transport possible over the summer tundra.

Even today, the whole tenor of life of these northern peoples centres on their reindeer. Neither horse, nor ox, nor mule could survive in these conditions: there would be nothing for them to eat and drink in winter, and it would be too costly to have their fodder brought in from outside. But the northern reindeer is fitted by nature for his task of striding through the frozen bogs and digging out his victuals from under the snow. The many-thousand strong herds survive on the ground fodder all the year round and require a minimum of care; they are therefore a model of efficient animal husbandry—a team of four or five stockmen can look after as many as two thousand reindeer in a herd. Moreover, the reindeer provides all that is necessary for human existence: the hide for making the tents, clothing, bedding, sleeping bags, and so on. From his gut the Siberians make waterproof thread; and his meat provides more than the staple diet, it is sent in large quantities to distribution centres. Finally, reindeer sledges are the most reliable form of transport in the whole of the tundra.

The reindeer are difficult animals to ride, but they can be harnessed to a sledge and made to pull loads; a visitor would be amazed at the skill of native drivers as they control these semi-wild beasts.

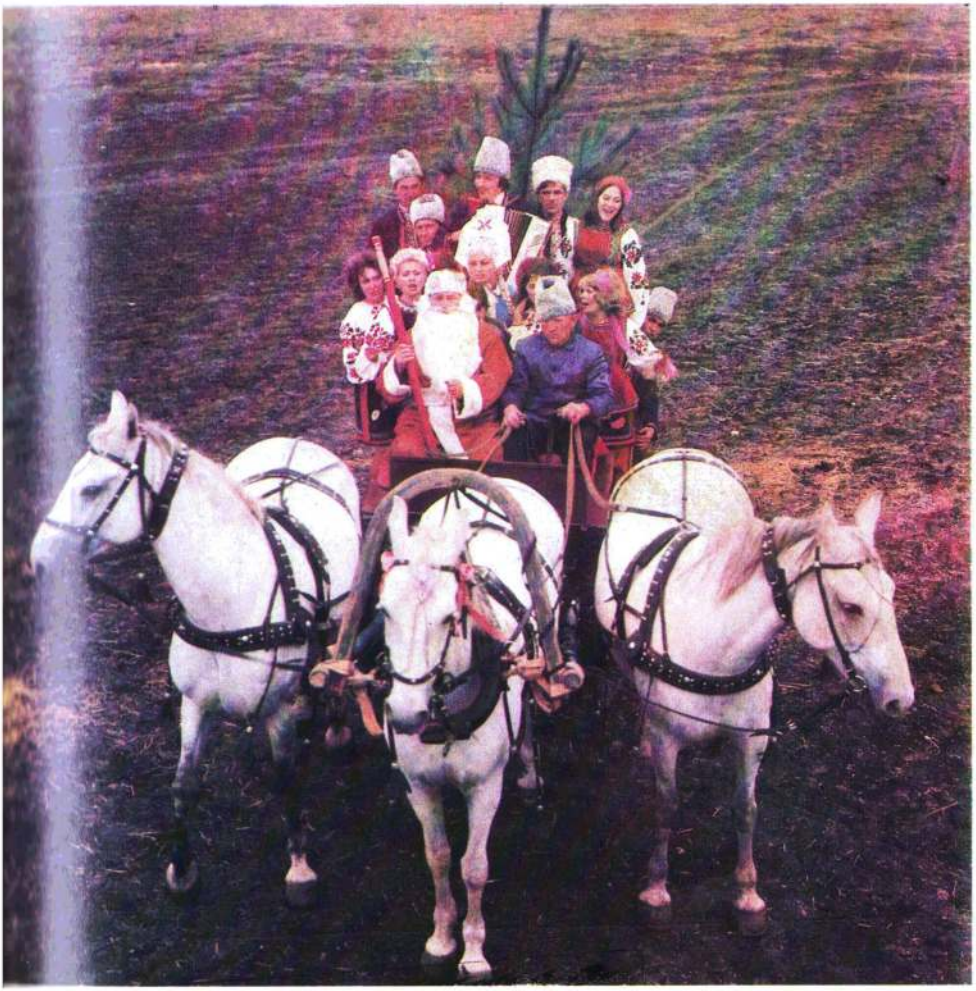
There is no denying that the daily life of a present-day reindeer herder cannot compare with that of his predecessors. All the same, the nomadic life has remained: the herder has to keep his herd constantly on the move in search of new pastures; he does not have the luxury of allowing himself to grow accustomed to household comforts. All he needs has to be carried with him. So he lives and travels light. However, settled

bases do exist today, such as the tundra-dwellers of the last century could not even dream of. Settlements have grown up within the whole national area with their pretty houses, shops, children's nurseries, polyclinics and schools. They house the families of the reindeer herders and provide the education for every child of the tundra. True, when the summer holidays come round, there is no holding the boys and girls: off they go about the tundra to join their parents or elder brothers. By the end of summer, they are picked up by specially detailed helicopters from the scattered stock teams.

The modern urban-dweller would find it hard to visualise the life of the nomad stockman. The most sophisticated technical machines of our days find no application among the nomads, in so far as the constantly travelling stockman cannot afford to carry a heavy load. Everything has to be kept down to a minimum. He has to make do with a rough and ready existence; not for him the home comforts of the settled life. A reindeer herder working in a collective farm can today earn himself no mean wages with which he could buy a car, motorbike, refrigerator, piano, washing or sewing machine. But ... he cannot take them with him; so he has no use for them. Of all the gadgets of modern living, the one he has most use for is his wireless with which he can keep in regular contact with the central farm and can summon a helicopter at any moment to bring medical or other urgent assistance.

This rather lengthy diversion was necessary in order to explain the origin, content and amazing vitality of the national sports that are popular in the Soviet Far North. Many of them are unique to this area. Nowadays, badges of Master of National Sport of Russian Federation may be seen on lapels of smartly-dressed young people in the towns and settlements of the tundra.

Since we have mentioned the wild reindeer of the Arctic regions, it is apposite here to refer to the most exotic of the contests that are held in this land—reindeer sled racing. No traditional reindeer-breeder festival would be complete without it. In the Nenets National Area, for example, the races take place on the first Sunday in August at several places simultaneously. Representatives of two or three local reindeer state or collective farms come together for the contest and the farm management usually gives out the prizes to the ultimate winners.



Many nations have traditional celebrations to mark the harvest festival. Such a tradition has also survived in Russia, with the Don and Kuban Cossacks, who to this day hold harvest festivals

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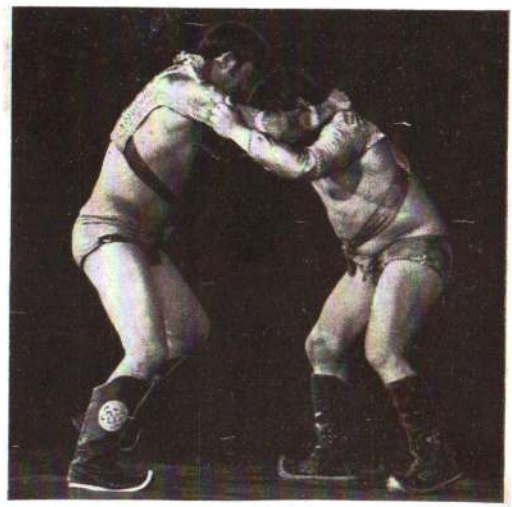
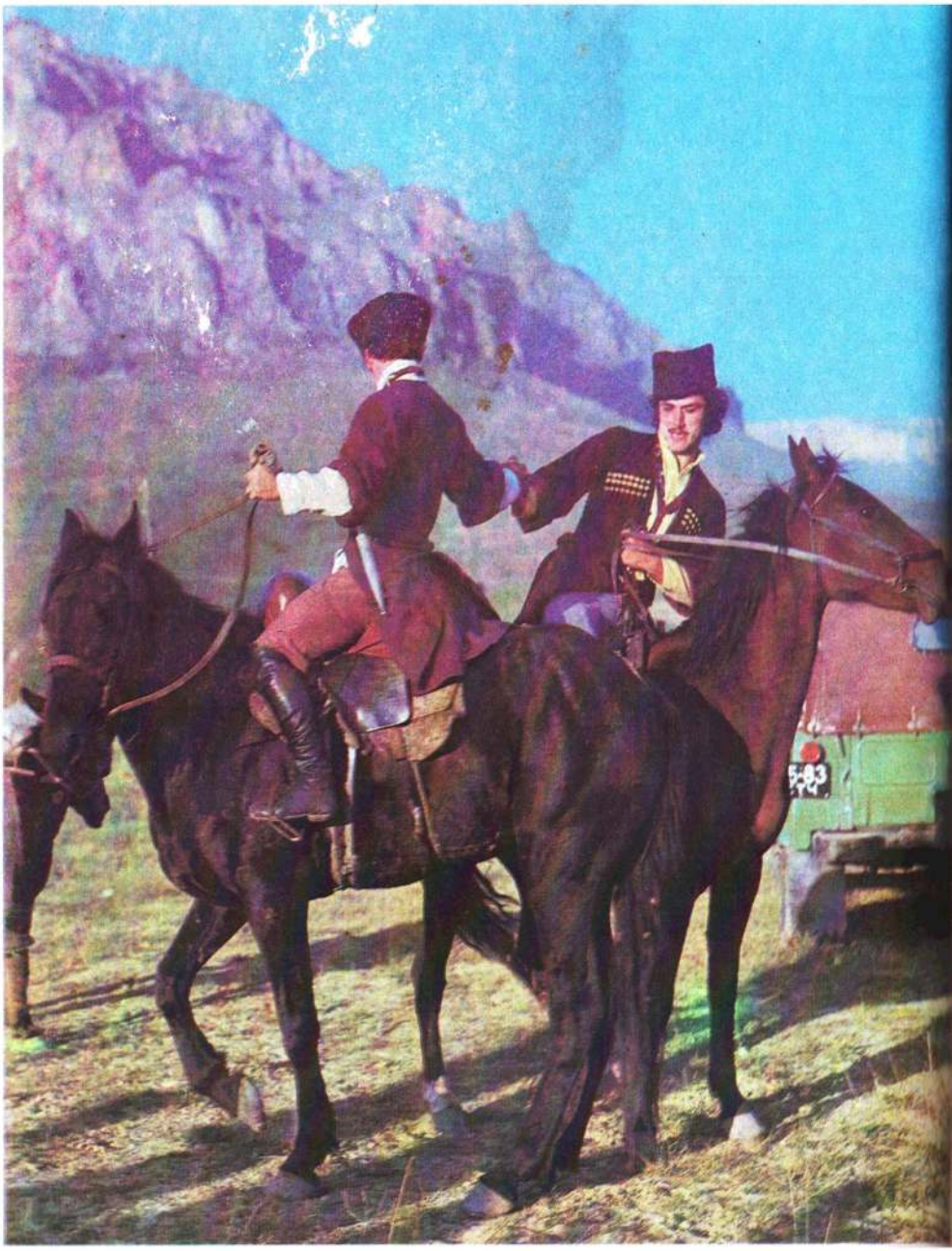
Every people has its own national sports: where the Russians have played *gorodki* since time immemorial the Evenks, Chukchi and Yakuts have competed among st themselves at jumping over sledges and wielding the *lynzei*—a type of lasso

Wrestling is perhaps the oldest of all sports, and this gives added interest to national wrestling competitions: here we see the Tuvinian form, known as *huresh*

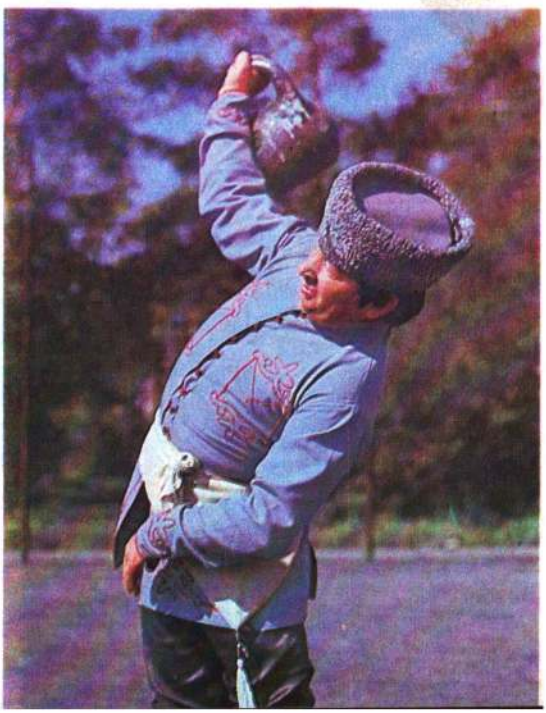
All over the world and all through
the age it has been customary for young
men to pit their strength against
one another and to endeavour to prove
their superiority over an opponent
in skill and agility

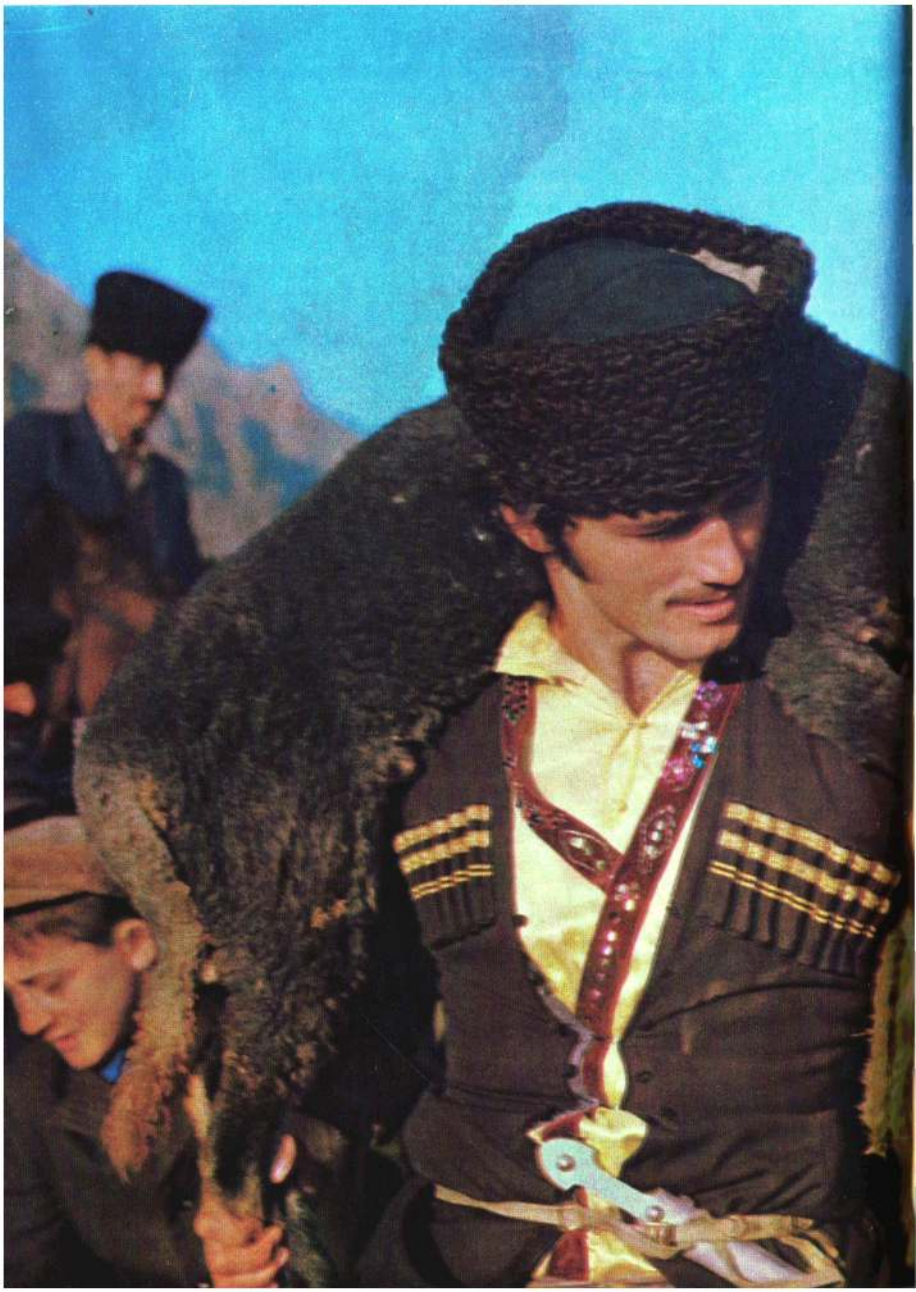
The eagle dance is performed
in the Tuvinian sport of *huresh*
by the winner.
The Khakassian form of wrestling.





The Northern Caucasus is especially rich in different national sports: single combat on horseback, *tskhenburti*—a form of polo, and weightlifting contests





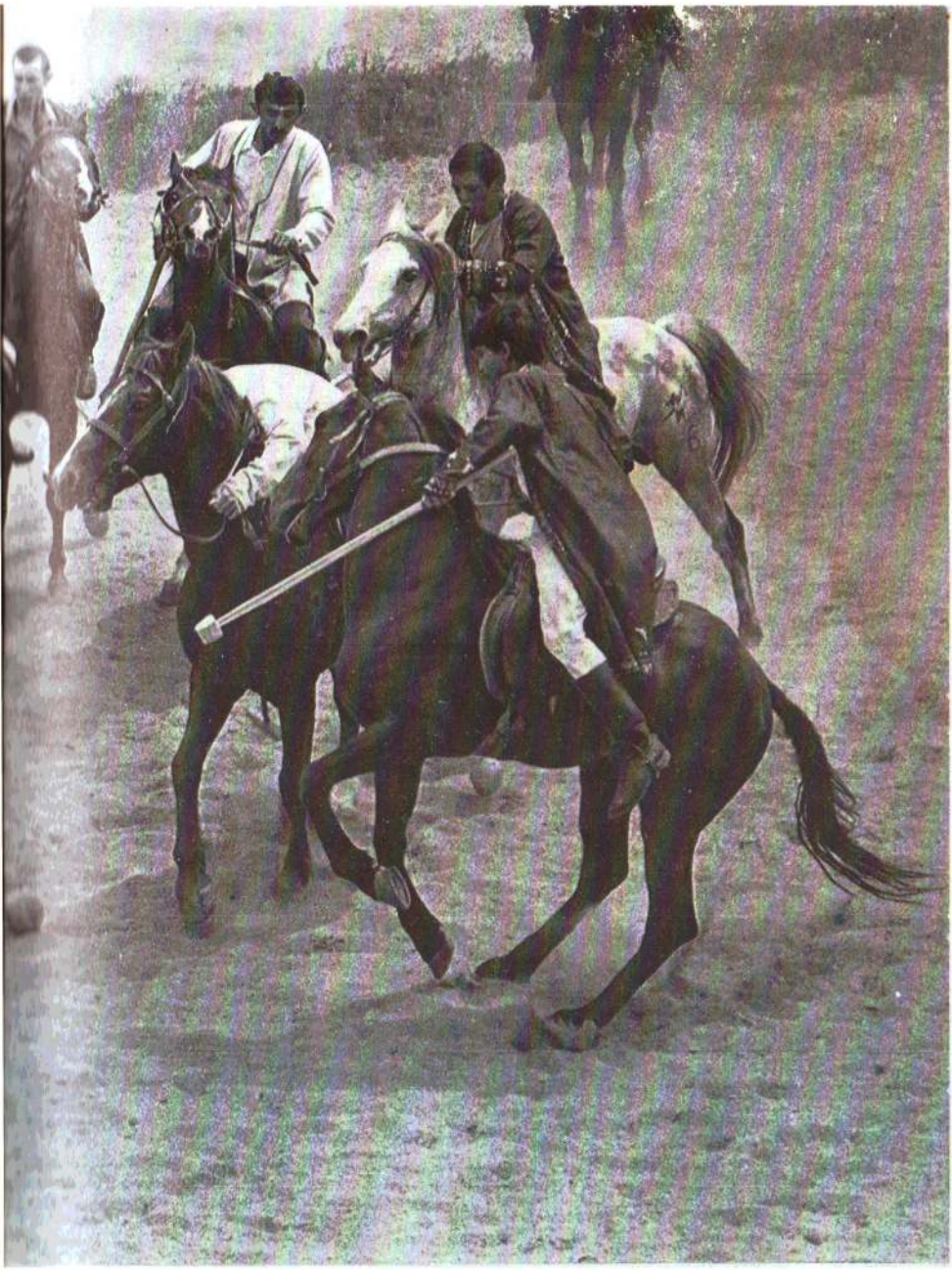
The prize in sports contests in the Northern Caucasus is often a live ram

The experts demonstrate the moves and holds in their traditional form of wrestling

The national festivals of Central Asia have a history going back many centuries, and the ancient rituals have been enhanced by modern festivities.
Uzbek musicians announce the opening of the festival in the Pakhtakor Stadium in Tashkent.
Every inhabitant of Uzbekistan from the youngest to the oldest knows what *kurash* is. No single festival is held without the inclusion of this traditional wrestling. Thousands of eager fans gather round the mat on which the wrestlers pit their skills.
"Chasing the girl"— such is the intriguing name given this equestrian sport popular in Tajikistan

Goresh—Turkmen Wrestling

Chavgonbozi—a form of polo and one of the most ancient traditional sports in Tajikistan



Kyz-kuu—catch the maiden—Kazakh national horse racing

The *narty* are light and durable sledges; every detail is held together without a single nail, only with straps. They may not be so easy to drive, and yet young and old alike—from ten to seventy—can drive them expertly. Incidentally, it is probably the only sports competition in the Far North in which women compete on equal terms with men and achieve the same and sometimes even better results. Reindeer and dog sled racing is extremely popular in the European part of the Far North and in Yakutia, Chukotka and other northern Siberian regions where reindeer herding exists.

The sledge is normally harnessed to five reindeer spread out fan-wise. The animal on the extreme left is the leader. One version of such races—the most intricate—is when all the reindeer run at a gallop and the leader is meant to trot. The beasts are steered by a single rein and controlled by a long, four-metre pole known as a *horei*. A distance of about 250 metres is paced out over relatively even ground. The rider invariably has to demonstrate his skill by turning his charges backwards while racing at full speed. On some occasions, like the traditional Northern Festival held in Murmansk, the winter snow-covered racecourse is made in a circle and covers one and a half kilometres.

Reindeer racing is one of the most widespread and probably most ancient of all competitions. All the same, the races are local affairs. Other national sports are contested at the same time in which the contestants vie both for national area honours and for team championships. Such matches include the traditional tournaments involving all-in championships mentioned above. Such tournaments are held regularly in Salehard, Naryan-Mar and Khanti-Mansiisk.

These competitions have a special place in the lives of the local inhabitants for two reasons. In the first place, they are very carefully prepared as a grand festival. From the sporting point of view they are of particular importance because their programme is so diverse. Winners are declared on both an individual and an overall basis.

It is here that ancient and modern come together. On the one hand are exercises which have come straight from the age-old pasture lands. On the other is the well-run organisation and strict adjudication which enable the organisers to establish the results with appropriate exactitude.

It goes without saying that every participant has a reason for winning or at least doing well: it is a great honour among the peoples of the Far North to become a prize-winner at such festivals.

The sports centre in Naryan-Mar is not particularly spacious. In fact, it is no more than a roughly even surface covered with sand and marked off with boundary stakes. (It is hardly worth laying the foundations for a proper stadium since the spring waters of the Pechora will flood the ground and turn the streets into a Venetian canal.) The megaphone announces the names of the sportsmen about to take part in the tournament, more often pronouncing the name Smetanin—of two brothers, Ilya and Gennady. The announcer mentions their name while aquainting the spectators with previous results among the teams from the national areas in folk sports—and the name of Ilya Smetanin crops up fairly frequently. He holds, for example, the record as overall champion which he set in 1973.

One name which will not be heard is their sister Raisa Smetanina: she will not be competing in the tournaments since only men take part in the competition for overall champion. On the other hand, many periodicals will print her name large and the radio broadcasts will make frequent references to her. This young lady from a stockman's family who always wanted to emulate her brothers at skiing has now become an eminent skier in her own right. After completing her education in a boarding school, for the children of reindeer herders, she graduated from a pedagogical college in Syktyvkar. Being hardy and tough from childhood, she was not afraid of persistent training and this soon paid dividends in sporting success. At the age of 22, Raisa made the Soviet national team and won her first gold medal in the skiing relay race at the 1974 world championships; she also won the bronze medal in the five-kilometre ski run. And two years later, at the Winter Olympics in Innsbruck, she became Olympic champion. Thus, her childhood interest in skiing eventually brought her the highest honours in the world of sport.

But let us return to the overall championship. It opens with a competition for *tynzei* (lasso) throwing. For these purposes, the *horei* is placed vertically on a special plinth, while the *tynzei* is made of a 20-metre length of rope. The modern chemical industry is not yet capable of manufacturing a material that can replace the age-old *tynzei*; neither nylon nor capron would

serve the purpose. As in centuries long past, the *tynzei* is carefully woven from slender strips of reindeer raw hide. Only this thong, about a finger-thickness, has sufficient toughness, elasticity, weight, resilience and other qualities needed for the job.

First of all two sportsmen take hold of the *tynzei* from both ends and stretch it to the best of their ability. Then they make rings in a neat pile, but not necessarily of the same size; the resultant pile is then divided into two equal parts: one part is held in the left hand, and the other one, with the loop, in the right. The aim is to throw the loop over the pole and then lash it tight. The participant does not have the right to overstep the 15-metre radius circle that is drawn around the pole. For the first correct lassoing, 300 points are awarded, the same amount for the second and 400 for the third. In other words, the maximum total of points that the player can amass is a thousand.

At first glance, the exercise would seem to be simple. But if anyone has tried to hurl a lasso accurately, he will realise at once that it is far from simple; and even many of the competition participants often fail to lasso the *horei* with their *tynzei.*

Ilya Smetanin, however, is a master of the lasso. He has won many traditional matches among teams from various national areas. In his hands, the lasso seems to do exactly as it is told, snaking its way across the ground to ensnare the pole. Similarly with his brother Gennady. Both the Smetanins are Komi by nationality and grew up in the tundra in a reindeer herder's family. It is said that a Komi boy can hurl his *tynzei,* and lasso whichever horn of a reindeer he chooses. After all, you have to catch your reindeer before you can harness him!

One may well ask what purpose such skills serve in the modern world. But the answer is not long in coming. It appears that both Ilya and Gennady are athletes in the full sense of the word; their skill is not confined to the business of the stockman of the tundra. The Smetanin brothers demonstrate their versatility in every sport on the northern folk game programme.

It stands to reason that for those participants in the games who have not grown up with a lasso in their hands, an event like lassoing a pile may turn out to be a fairly difficult task. They have to try their hand at it for the first time as

grown-ups—and often some of them make a reasonable job of it. But the real virtuosos are those whose forbears have handed on the skills down the years from their reindeer herding days.

National folk games are popular in the Far North because the tundra even in this day and age remains the tundra. Reindeer breeding remains the major feature of northern agriculture and probably will continue to do so for many years to come. Hence the *raison d'être* of contests which test the qualities that have a vital application to daily life. But there is another side to national sports. It is certainly true that they develop qualities of assistance to the herder or hunter. But there is more to it than that: the games possess their own attraction exciting people to master new exercises even though they themselves have no connection with reindeer breeding.

The Nenets National Area team, for example, has an outstanding player by the name of Gennady Shishov. When you see how surely he handles the *tynzei* and the axe, you naturally think he has wielded them all his life. Far from it. Shishov is a young Russian with little experience of the tundra life. He was fond of weightlifting and even took part in the All-Russia championships. He became a skilled acrobat as well. And when his companions urged him to help them out he willingly applied himself to the new sports. And how! In throwing the *tynzei* he set a new record of 39.5 m which brought him the champion's laurels at the Eleventh Tournament.

Examples of such all-round sportsmen are numerous. For example, Semyon Okkotetto is coach to the Yamalo-Nenets Area team and himself Master of Sport both in national sports and in sambo. Nikolai Rochev is another all-rounder: he has top results in running and skiing; the same goes for the Smetanin brothers and several others. Why is it that youngsters plump for national folk sports? It would appear that they best suit the local conditions and give people a good opportunity to display their ability.

In the northern parts of the USSR, national sports are relatively simple and easy to take up; they do not require expensive buildings or complex equipment. They can be practised in ordinary everyday surroundings.

Another item in the programme of the national games is sledge vaulting—a very eye-catching sport. The sledges or sleighs measure about half a metre in height and width, and taper upwards. Such identical sledges are placed alongside one

another until about two dozen are set down. It is no mean task to leap the sledges. They are placed parallel in a row so that there is just room for a footstep to be made between them. The jumper has to take off simultaneously on both feet and land exactly between two sledges and then, without a pause, repeat the vault again and again. When he reaches the end of the row in this fashion he has to make an about turn and complete the course all the way back again. And so it goes on as long as he has energy left to jump.

It is a fascinating spectacle. The results of the winners really are extraordinary: champion of the Eleventh Tournament, Ilya Smetanin, recorded as many as 169 jumps without a single hitch. It goes without saying that such a feat is only possible if the vaulter is at peak fitness, is an all-round athlete and has trained hard. If anyone has any doubt about that we would suggest that he might try his luck at home, vaulting over chairs placed in a row!

This sledge vaulting qualifies for the Soviet national sports standards classifications and even for the title of Master of National Sports of the Russian Federation—for which the target is 75 sledges.

No less interesting is the axe-throwing competition. The axe is beginning to lose its former hunting and domestic importance in the Siberian settlements, and is now becoming a purely sporting implement. As such the axe head has a rather unusual shape: it weighs some 400 grams, is small and flat, and would hardly do for chopping anything except brushwood. The axe handle is long and flat and not much wider than an ordinary piece of plywood; furthermore, it is tapered at the edge so it takes some practice to hold it properly.

It is hurled not from behind the back like a javelin, but from the side with the arm raised to the level of the shoulder. Undoubtedly, distance is gained not only by force of the throw but by aerodynamic force developed by this uncommon projectile. In flight the axe whirls round in a horizontal plane like a propeller; and if the aim is not accurate it may act rather like a boomerang and suddenly dip steeply or deviate at any point in flight. It is meant to land only in a narrow 30-metre corridor.

The results these masters of the axe attain really take some beating. Suffice it to say that the record in this event is 152 m 17 cm. It was established back in 1973 by A. Semeikin from the

Evenk team. The axe has to be projected as far as 120 m to qualify for the title of Master of National Sports of the Russian Federation—and that exceptional mark has been made by no few exponents. For comparison, it is interesting to observe that none of the Olympic throwing events has ever achieved such a distance.

Finally, it remains to comment on the means of scoring the overall winner in these northern games. There should be no doubt by now that anyone who enters all the events needs to be a real athlete in the full sense of the word if he is going to come out on top. A total of 5,000 points has to be amassed in order to take the Master of Sport title; this is no mean task if you bear in mind the qualities needed to compete: accuracy, stamina, resilience, a keen eye and sharpness. One cannot but admire the young people who take part in this colourful and wide-ranging programme of events in the Far North of the Soviet Union.

The whole area of the Polar Circle, Siberia, the Soviet Far East and Transbaikal is immense—far greater than the whole of Europe outside the USSR put together. Yet it is thinly populated: while it is estimated that some 300-350 citizens of Western Europe take up a square kilometre, some areas of Chukotka—the most north easterly land in the USSR—have no more than 50 persons per thousand square kilometres.

The constant need to be on the move with the roaming herds of reindeer makes for a hardy way of life. In a single day a stockman has to run around his herd several times to check that none of them go astray or fall into the clutches of a prowling wolf. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it is here that a type of marathon has grown up: a long-distance race over the snow.

Young Chukchi, Koryaks and Eskimos have long enjoyed racing over a distance of 25-30 kilometres. The qualities developed in training and participating in such races help the native population to acquire more quickly the sort of skills needed in the stockman's job, to safeguard the herd from the depredations of wild animals.

Soviet sports organisations have worked out competition regulations for the Chukotka snow race and even established ranking standards in the sport. Now official championships for collective farms and regions are held as well as for other national folk games. Now and again senior level tournaments are put on—for national area and inter-region titles con-

tested by teams from the Koryak and Chukotka national areas and the northern districts of the Yakut Autonomous Republic.

The temperature falls to forty degrees of frost yet these hardy Siberians do not sit huddled in their warm tents and homes, they set out from remote pastures to meet up with friends and relatives whom they have not seen for some time; they exchange news and bandy jokes. But all attention is focused on the coming races. Although the race ahead is a relatively short one—a mere 15 kilometres—it is looked forward to with particular keenness.

"Have you heard, Yakutia has included that top runner Kovalyov in their team?" says one old Koryak to another sucking on his short clay pipe. "I'd like to see how someone from town measure up to our lads."

Kovalyov, in fact, who had once been one of the best long-distance runners in the northern Caucasus, had no doubts about it. His mighty lungs and well-trained heart from pounding hundreds of miles in training made him a favourite to win any cross-country run.

The snow run, beaten and pounded by the winds, was hard and smooth like parquet flooring. That would prove no problem to an experienced runner. What was unusual was the fact that running over snow at such low temperatures meant discarding the normal running shoes and shorts and putting on a fur-lined *parka*, gloves and good strong boots. Further, the conditions of the race forced each runner to hold a shepherd's crook.

The track wound up and down, round and about. There seemed to be no end to the countless little lakes, brooks and streams covered in ice. And then the snow would slip and slide under one's boots; it wasn't a tartan running track after all. The runner's warm breath hit the cold air and formed icicles on the collar of his jacket to the windward side. The crook turned out to be of great help in keeping his balance and seeking out the dangerous snowdrifts. As the runners made their way out into the tundra, a small group could be seen between snowy hummocks of land.

"Where is that famous runner?" asked the old fellow with a crafty glint in his eye.

One behind the other the runners made their way to the finishing post, with the exhausted Caucasian runner way behind

in tenth place, just ahead of the five remaining runners. He looked far from being an exalted winner of countless races.

"To tell the truth," he admitted afterwards to his friends, "I wanted to pack up several times during the race. I was soaked to the skin, the sweat stung my eyes so that I couldn't see. I found it hard to breathe in such frost and my legs wouldn't obey me. I wasn't interested in winning, I can tell you; I was just intent on getting home. After all, you can hardly quit the race when you're stranded in the middle of the tundra: you'd freeze to death. And no one's going to send out a helicopter to pick me up. Even if they did I'd have become a laughing stock and never lived it down. That's the only thing that made me keep on to the finish."

The ultimate winner, though, looked as fresh as a daisy. It turned out to be a reindeer herder by the name of Rylgutin; so delighted was he at winning his first big race that, when the bus came to take the athletes back to town, he refused to sit down, feeling too fresh to take a rest.

"I could run back to town myself," he exclaimed, and ran a good five kilometres behind the bus, to the central hotel!

Eastern Siberia alone could with ease accommodate the whole of France, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Italy and West Germany together. It is crossed from south to north by the mighty Lena River—one of the world's greatest rivers. This remarkable land is also noted for containing the world's coldest inhabited place—Oimyakon, where temperatures of 70°C below zero have been recorded. In this land, or rather in its underground caverns, lie a real treasure-house of mineral wealth—diamonds and tin, gold and coal, oil and iron ore. These are the valuable attributes of Yakutia. And much manpower is needed to mine the wealth. That is why the population composition here is constantly being reinforced by members of many different republics of the USSR. At the same time, the native population—the Yakuts—jealously continue and preserve their age-old national culture despite the intermingling with people of many other different nationalities.

It has to be remembered that before the coming of the Russians, the Yakuts had no written language. For that reason, the basic historical records only date from the seventeenth century when the first more or less reliable descriptions were

made of purely national Yakut games and sports that we shall refer to below.

The Yakuts had an extremely large variety of different national sports, including the *hapsagai* form of wrestling, pole tugging, various jumps and vaults, reindeer and dog sled racing, a type of draughts, and so on.

The Yakut regional committee of the Communist Party passed an *ad hoc* resolution to preserve and promote national sports; subsequently the Yakut Council on Physical Culture described a dozen sports and prescribed competitive rules for them which operate right up to the present. Naturally, the emergence of big and small towns, the overall growth in health and living standards, and the extension of means of communication were all bound to bring modern "classical" sports into the lives of the peoples inhabiting these eastern parts of Siberia. However, the inclement climate here and the very specific working and living conditions have severely restricted their universal application. The permafrost, for example, makes it practically impossible to construct any large sports amenities without which football and athletics, to give but two examples, cannot develop on any wide scale.

So the local sports tend to have held their own. Although they have much in common with the folk games played by other nationalities of Siberia, they are distinguished by their own unique qualities. Of course, reindeer herders would be expected to engage in traditional reindeer and dog sled racing whatever the location; similarly with archery and hunting-knife throwing games. At the same time, there have gradually developed and crystallised types of sport which less express their applied nature to the life and work of the nomadic herder. On the other hand, the sports promote wide-ranging athletic qualities which people need for virtually all trades—as with wrestling, jumping and pole pulling.

The great array of Yakut national sports may be witnessed at any of the *ysyakh kumiss* festivals dedicated to winter's end. The opening ceremony is particularly colourful and unique: a singer first emerges who sings a greeting in Yakut to all those who are taking part in the games. Then Yakut girls come forward each bearing a *choron* (bowl for drinking the fermented mare's milk or *kumiss*), form a circle and dance the national dance *yoher*. Only then can the competitions commence. All of them bear a representative character—i.e., the players are keen to fulfil

their classification standards to qualify for a sports ranking or even Master title.

Back in the late 1950s when the local tournaments had already acquired fully modern organisational forms, the time was ripe for creating a uniform classification for the various national sports. This set standard then included the *hapsagai* and the various jumping sports—*kylyy, ystanga* and *kuobakh.*

This measure had a considerable impact on the sports life of the republic, in so far as young people who had up to then practised their own esoteric local sports now received real encouragement to improve their skill through universal set standards, and a yardstick to measure themselves against others.

Another important innovation was smooth-run organisation of the many stages of national sport contests. They begin at the lowest level in clubs attached to the various farms, factories or schools. Then the next step up is the district championships, followed by zonal meetings (there are 5-6 districts close to one another in each zone). The apex of this competitive pyramid is the championship of the Yakut Autonomous Republic and the contests for the prize named after Vassily Manchara, a legendary national hero. The prize is competed every third year and Yakut national championships are held in-between. Both these competitions are of the same standing and qualify competitors for an attempt at reaching Master standard.

The programme includes *hapsagai* wrestling, pole tugging and Yakut jumping. True, in the very northerly regions of this vast autonomous republic where reindeer breeding is widespread, other national sports and games are more popular—and even suitable; these embrace lasso throwing (the *chaut*), reindeer and dog sled racing. Representatives of the various districts compete in the localities according to their own programme. But if they come to take part in the Yakutia championships they have to follow the set programme on the same basis as everyone else.

The contests are normally disputed by Yakuts, Russians, Ukrainians and people from the many different nationalities that populate Yakutia. Because of this multinational entry, the most "universal" sports are chosen for inclusion in the games. That is why relatively few folk games are actually selected from the great variety of national sports: the *hapsagai* wrestling, pole tugging and the *kylyy, ystanga* and *kuobakh* jumps. What exactly are these meetings?

It can be stated quite categorically that the *kylyy* are certainly unique. The athlete takes a long run, thrusts off from a bar and seems to launch himself into space. Short leg movements alone give him further impetus to continue his flight for up to eleven steps. The most characteristic feature of the jump is the way the jumper uses one and the same leg to thrust himself forward and only on the last leap lands on both legs. At first glance, this would seem to be comparatively simple. It is precisely this apparent simplicity that once led to an incident which occurred in Moscow and has gradually grown into a legend. It happened at the State Central Institute of Physical Culture at which a Yakut, Pyotr Mestnikov, was studying; he had journeyed the thousands of miles all the way to Moscow to continue his studies—like many of his countrymen who further their education at various institutions all over the Soviet Union and beyond.

And at some moment in his stay he fell into conversation with his fellow students about the triple jump in athletics.

"We in Yakutia have a jump called the *kylyy*," Pyotr told his companions, "in which we do eleven jumps in a row hopping on one leg."

"I bet you won't jump far like that," said one of his conversants sceptically.

"Well, that's where you're wrong," exclaimed Pyotr. "If you don't believe me, let's go and I'll show you."

By that time a whole group of students had gathered round and now trouped out to the recreation area after Pyotr. He stripped down to his running shorts, marked a starting line on a reasonably even stretch of turf, and demonstrated his Yakut jumping skills to the amazement of the onlookers. When his colleagues measured out the distance they could hardly believe their eyes—a full thirty-nine metres!

There was no lack of eager volunteers to try their luck at the new jumping style. But the student triple jump champion was given pride of place to try first. As the crowd stood back in expectation, he took a long run-up and made a long firm first jump. But his lack of skill at the new style caused him to fall short of the original distance, and he could only manage about 37 metres. It hardly needs saying that all the other aspiring jumpers fell short of that mark.

The Yakut jump that had so resembled the flight of some strong bird left a deep impression. The analogy with the bird is

not fortuitous, since the Yakuts themselves associate the origins of these amazing jumps with poetical legends about the flight of magical birds.

The *kylyy* jumping has earned itself a place as a firm favourite in the national tournaments and has been taken up with great aplomb by Russians, Evenks and Chukchi as well as Yakuts. One of its distinguishing graces is its simplicity and convenience: all that is needed in the way of equipment is a relatively even small patch of clear land on dry ground or even on hard snow.

Yakut jumping is even being practised by athletes training for other sports as a very useful form of developing fitness and skill. There is an undeniable direct link between national and "classical" jumping styles. Just one example is the case of Vladimir Gotovtsev who, while a student of Yakut State University, became long jump record-holder of Yakutia at the same time as fulfilling his Master of Sport standard for Yakut jumping. Also, secondary schoolteacher Nikolai Sannikov set a Yakut record for the triple jump as well as for national jumping.

Contests are now held on a stable and regular basis as the times demand. The jump is made from a full run-up and so now has a proper run-up track marked out (although the regulations do not specify a particular distance, it is usually no more than 40-45 metres) and a "corridor" for the jumps. The take-off point is marked by a white-painted wooden plank inserted in the ground so as not to hinder the jumper; it measures some 20 cm in width. Furthermore, to make it easier to mark the take-off point, a strip of damp sand is laid alongside the take-off plank at a width of 10 cm. This "mould" takes a clear imprint of each jumper's take-off foot so that it is possible to mark exactly any infringements of the jump. Of course, if anyone oversteps the mark their jump is not counted.

If the event of the competition being of a representative nature—e.g., a zonal or final meeting for the Yakut national championships—special markers are placed alongside the jumping track at intervals of three and a half metres. Plywood boards numbered consecutively from one to twelve are placed alongside the running track to provide spectators with a clear indication of the jumper's position. Each competitor may make his own mark on the run-up track as long as it does not interfere with other competitors.

Each jump is measured with the utmost care. If the jumper has made a clean take-off, has neither overstepped the mark or stepped sideways off the track, he must leave the jumping pit following his jump only to the front or sideways to the front. At once the judge makes a special mark, sticking in a small stake at the side of the jumping pit exactly in line with the mark left by the last part of the jumper's body. It is from there that the jump is measured by means of a 50-metre metal tapemeasure which starts at the landing point and is taken back to the edge of the take-off plank facing the jumping pit.

Results shown by the very skilful jumpers really do need to be seen to be believed. It is not infrequent for all eleven jumps to tot up to forty or more metres. It does not take much arithmetic know-how to work out that each jump taken separately (on one leg, at that) measures over three and a half metres on average. This sport gives young people an opportunity to satisfy their natural inclination to prove themselves and win a place of honour among their peers. The title of Master of National Sports of the Russian Federation is awarded only for setting an All-Union record or as a result of jumps in the overall programme (more about that below). In the case of *kylyy*, the guiding mark is 42 m. At one time, the supreme award for such a jump was the title of Master of Sport of the Yakut Autonomous Republic; but since 1961 when the Uniform All-Russia Classification System for National Sports was instituted, that title went out of usage. Nowadays, it takes 39 m to reach the first ranking; alternatively a sportsman may win the championship of his national area, region or the Yakut Autonomous Republic. The all-time record stands to the credit of Pyotr Mestnikov who jumped a total of 42 m 95 cm back in 1968.

No less attractive and exciting to watch are other Yakut jumps. The point should be made that all national games championships are widely advertised. To attract crowds to the stadiums, colourful posters are hung in all populated areas around; they give details of where and when the tourney is to be held, exactly what the programme is, what athletes and teams are taking part. Information hand-outs are also issued giving details of the given sports event, its background, champions and results recorded down the years. Personal invitation cards are printed and sent out to all the VIPs of the district, labour and war veterans, famous ex-athletes and sports

officials. This meticulous preparation is certainly justified by the colourful festivals that result; they long remain in the memory of both participants and spectators alike.

An enthusiastic public also follows the *ystanga* jumping event. Just as in *kylyy,* a run-up track is marked out to provide a corridor for the competitors; and little white sandbags serve the jumpers as markers for their run, the judges and the public. These are spaced out at intervals of three and a half metres. The most obvious difference in rules is that the participant uses alternate legs to pace out his eleven hops and therefore produces quite a different coordination of movement; once again, the competent jumpers can only reach a reasonable standard after considerable practice.

This jumping style thus makes *ystanga* rather reminiscent of the triple jump in which the jumper takes off on one foot, skips onto the second and lands with both feet on the ground. But the relationship is a distant one notwithstanding the success achieved by native jumpers brought up on the folk sport and transferring its technique to the triple jump during their study years.

Results in the *ystanga* somewhat fall behind those in the *kylyy,* but by an insignificant amount.

These sporting occasions invariably take on a festive air. Although the regulations do not lay down the exact dress in which the sportsman has to perform, it is an unwritten rule that every participant should wear a clean, neat and numbered kit. If he is competing for a team he has to wear the same colours and appropriate emblem as his team mates. The match officials take responsibility for seeing that each competitor takes part in the right age category. Athletes up to 19 compete in the junior group, while those of 19 and above qualify for the senior category. The only exceptions are for sportsmen who have achieved certain sporting qualifications: if, for example, a young man of 17-18 is sufficiently developed and possesses a first sports ranking, he may be permitted to compete in the senior group.

The contests may be individual, team, individual-and-team or classificational. In each case, they are only operative when each team has no less than three persons and when no fewer than three teams line up for the start.

The third jumping style is the *kuobakh.* The only similar event to this is the triple jump that is popular in the European Far

North in which the jumper takes off with both feet. All the same *kuobakh* is quite original. First of all, the jumper has to make eleven hops in a row on both feet, rather like a rabbit hop—though no rabbit, no matter how expert at hopping, would have the strength to complete the human course. Anyone who wants to win at *kuobakh* has to follow the little white sandbag markers spaced out at three metres from one another; he has no run-up as in *kylyy* and *ystanga*, but stands back about a metre or a metre and a half behind the starting line and then begins his jumping or hopping from the take-off plank.

All eleven hops have to be made uniformly without the slightest pause. Umpires keep a wary eye on competitors to make sure that the feet are together all the time both in landing and in flight. To give himself impetus the jumper vigorously thrusts his half-bent arms back and forward, pendulum fashion, putting all his force into the jump at the end of each arm thrust.

The ranking norms are considerably lower for *kuobakh* than in the other two jumping styles; all the same, the victor of one of the Siberian and Far East championships, Nikolai Sannikov from the Yakutia team did the *kuobakh* over a distance of 38 m 30 cm, though this is by no means the limit.

It will be of interest to describe one typical big contest, such as the Yakutia championships or the national sports championships for Siberia and the Soviet Far East. The jumping events normally attract a few dozen competitors. Each jumper is allotted three tries, the best of which counts. After the preliminary jump-offs, the best eight competitors go forward into the final jump-off in which they are permitted another three jumps. It sometimes happens that two or more sportsmen share eighth place after the preliminaries; in this case they all proceed into the final. The order of jumping is decided by prior draw.

Even then the winner is decided upon in a not altogether straightforward manner. Out of the six jumps that each competitor makes throughout the competition, in the preliminaries and in the final, the best result is taken and forms the basis for choosing the victor. On occasion, there are ties for a place in the first three because more than one competitor has the same result; in such circumstances, priority goes to the person whose best remaining jump exceeds those of his rivals.

That, in brief, is the *kylyy, ystanga* and *kuobakh.* With the knowledge we have of each sport separately, it is not hard to see that, while each jumping style may not require entirely different skills (unlike, say, throwing and jumping), it does necessitate a different approach. Each has to be prepared for in a different way. All three jumps in fact make up the Yakut triathlon which is a real test of versatility and skill.

We have already mentioned that good results in each of the jumping styles enable the athlete to qualify for a sports ranking, and an All-Russia record gives the right to the title of Master of National Sports of the Russian Federation. This Master title may be won in the triathlon as well by totalling all the best results from the three individual jumps. In this instance, the jumper has to take first or second place in the Siberian and Far Eastern championships as a result of the overall result in the three jumps. This being the case, it is hardly surprising that these games attract a wide entry from all over Siberia: from Yakutia, Khakassia, Buryatia, Tuva, Aginsk and Ust-Ordynsk National Areas, the Gorno-Altai Autonomous Region, the Chita and Irkutsk regions, the Altai and Krasnoyarsk territories.

The most outstanding results shown by the real masters really are remarkable. The current record in the triathlon is 124.5 m. It belongs to Nikolai Sannikov, several times champion of Yakutia and the championships for Siberia and the Far East. A result of 110 m, by the way, qualifies the contender for the title of Master of Sport.

The normal timetable of events at such national matches is as follows: first come the jumps, then the pole tugging and lastly the *hapsagai* wrestling. The pole tugging is, like the jumping, a big favourite throughout Siberia. Youngsters take it up in childhood when they learn all the rules of the sport. It is one of those rare exhibitions where the spectators themselves are the strictest judges and are invariably full of advice and blandishments for the competitors.

It occasionally happens that encouragement from the crowd spurs on a competitor to bend the rules so as to win; he may give a sudden jerk of the pole before the command is given to start, or he may use all manner of tricks to put his rivals off balance. It is at such moments that the spectators play their part by spotting and shouting their disapproval of what they

see as foul play. And there is no greater shame than to be judged as unfair in full view of the public and by one's fellow men.

Similar public condemnation applies to a competitor who loses his temper seeing that he has lost, and suddenly lets go of his pole thus causing his opponent to fall back, possibly injuring himself. And if the censure of such unsporting tactics is not enough, a competitor is barred from the match if he repeats any illegal ploy.

Despite the evidently simple nature of the event, the contests are taken very seriously and the official meets organised with utmost solemnity. The event has its official classifications which are judged very strictly. The weight categories are as follows: (for adults) lightweight—up to 70 kg, and heavyweight—70 kg and over; (for juniors) lightweight—up to 65 kg; heavyweight—65 kg and more. The weighing-in takes place three hours before the start of the competition; one curious note is that a sportsman is disqualified from competition if he is above or even under the specified weight standard.

Now all the preparations are over. A court has been marked out by white cloth strips or white painted lines, measuring four metres long and two metres wide. A board a metre and a quarter long and up to 35 cm wide is then laid down for the competitors to stand on. The pole is generally made of strong larch or birch, and is three and a half centimetres in diameter and 122 cm in length.

The competitors enter the court like boxers in a ring from opposite corners. At the referee's signal, they come to the centre and shake hands. Then takes place the draw to decide ends and choice of first grip on the pole. This is of some importance because the person who has the right to take first grip of the pole can choose the best hold, whether narrow or wide—i. e., whether he places his hands on the pole inside or outside his opponent's grip.

The two competitors then sit opposite one another with the board between them on which they press their heels. Catching hold of the pole with their hands as they wish—from below, above or with one palm up and the other below, they raise the pole into a position parallel and above the board. Arms and legs must be extended to the side no wider than the knee or elbow. And the two competitors may begin to pull as soon as the referee gives the command or blows his whistle.

Their arms take the strain and knots of muscles stand out on their bodies, their faces and necks turn red from the exertion; the fans give their favourite rousing support and the pole starts to move imperceptibly towards one side or the other. But no one seems to have a clear advantage. The bout is confined to three minutes, with minute time signals given by a timekeeper who calls "time" at the end of the three minutes. If no clear winner is forthcoming by that time, the referee gives another blast on his whistle to halt the bout and declare a draw. The duration of the contest may only be extended if one of the competitors is injured. In that instance the bout is called to a halt for three minutes while the man is treated. If that time is up and the sportsman cannot continue, he is declared defeated. At the end of the match, the competitors remain in their places until the result is declared, then they shake hands and leave the arena.

The best possible result is, of course, a clear victory. To achieve it, a contestant has to pull his opponent over to his side while holding onto the pole. If a contestant lets go of the pole after the command "gop", he is adjudged to have lost. He also loses the bout if he fails to enter the ring at the appointed time. In that event, his opponent is given victory with an "ideal" time of 00 mins. 00 secs. A win brings two points, a draw one and defeat none.

No competitor is permitted to take part in more than four bouts in one day, with a minimum interval between bouts of quarter of an hour. The overall victor is decided by the greatest total of points. If there are several contestants with the same number of points, preference is given to the one with the least time taken in all his bouts; if even then the scores are equal, victory goes to the contestant who has beaten individually any of those drawing with him in points total.

In modern-day Yakutia there are big cities, mines and industrial enterprises and even relatively small settlements with all the comforts of modern living. Nevertheless, it has taken some time for conditions to make the introduction of "classical" sports a possibility. They have not been able to make many inroads into the popularity of the folk games.

On the other hand, a great deal is to be gained from their mutual enrichment. Examples are legion. Take Pyotr Alexeyev for instance: this Yakut construction engineer possesses a unique collection of trophies. He is a Master of Sport of the

USSR and Master of National Sports of the Russian Federation. He began with his native *hapsagai* wrestling, then turned to free-style wrestling and won his Russian Federation championship weight division four times. Or Dmitry Danilov, a graduate of the History and Modern Languages Faculty of Yakutsk State University, who first developed a mastery in the Yakut *hapsagai* and jumping. Subsequently, he changed to free-style wrestling and became the Russian champion; he was the first Yakut wrestler to become a Master of Sport of the USSR. These and numerous similar histories testify to the vitality of national sports and the great utility in applying them properly to other sports events.

The Yakut *hapsagai* was included in the events of the traditional national sports spartakiad for Siberia and the Soviet Far East in 1973. *Hapsagai* has had a particularly interesting history since it first became a recognised sport; it began with just fifty enthusiasts and now has some sixteen and a half thousand followers. In this time the republic has built up a strong team of excellent knowledgeable coaches whose efforts have resulted in some three thousand first-ranking wrestlers, 357 candidate masters of sport, 151 masters of sport and six international class masters of sport. That is some record. Two Yakut wrestlers—R. Dmitriev and P. Pinigin—have reached the peak of Merited Master of Sport of the USSR and have defended their country's honour successfully at top international matches, European and world championships and the Olympic Games.

The first wrestler to win the master title was D. Danilov back in 1960; since then over fifteen masters and 30 candidate masters have on average earned their titles every year.

This gives some idea how skilled Yakut wrestlers are both in their native sport and in wrestling generally.

The development of free-style wrestling in the Yakut Autonomous Republic has given great encouragement to many other sports that are presently being cultivated within the republic; it has also become the firm foundation of physical education of the whole population. In turn, Yakut free-style wrestling owes much of its popularity and expertise to the folk traditions of the Yakut *hapsagai.* After all, the first Yakut free-style wrestling champions, coaches and enthusiasts whose names are today known far and wide beyond Yakutia had been exciting exponents of *hapsagai*—such victors at national meets

as S. Li Fu, M. Maladyrov, D. Danilov, I. Kondratiev, V. Rumyantsev, D. Korkin and many others. Most importantly, in giving all their strength and knowledge to the development of free-style wrestling, they and thousands of others in the towns and remote settlements of Yakutia are continuing to uphold and cherish the *hapsagai*. It is therefore not surprising that most prominent Yakut sportsmen made their first steps in sport by grace of this dearly-loved and superbly national sport.

As a national folk sport, *hapsagai* has its roots deep in the past and is ineluctably associated with the way of life, history and development of the republic's culture.

When the Russians came to Yakutia in the seventeenth century, the native tribes—the Yakuts, Yukagirs, Lamuts, Chukchi and Evens—lived at various states of social and economic development. Deer-breeding, fishing and hunting were their basic occupations which naturally implied a nomadic way of life.

The first detailed information on the way of life of the populace of this remote part of the Russian Empire may be found in the work of the exiled Russian scholar and revolutionary I. Khudyakov, who was banished to the cold outpost of Verkhoyansk at the end of the last century. In his "Brief Description of the Verkhoyansk Region", he wrote that "The Lamuts assemble with their families in their nomad camps in early June and into the last days of July. For the whole of this time the camp is a real festival. Of an evening the amusements commence: running, jumping, riding, tests of strength (pole pulling), racing on reindeer, wrestling, fighting and so on.

"They have one sport in which they link their middle fingers and try to pull each other over. They wrestle by grabbing each other round the waist, but do not try to trip, instead they throw each other to the ground or topple over together. They also run like the wind. Winners are rewarded with prizes of reindeer, a robe or knife."

It should be added that most events and popular games have not simply retained their popularity, they have extended it over the Soviet years and become a means of drawing young people into sport and physical fitness. To the extent that alien sports like fist-fighting have died a natural death in Soviet times, so too such positive pursuits as vaulting, archery and wrestling (the centrepiece of most contests and folk festivals) have grown in popularity and established themselves.

The name of Valery Kochnev is known far and wide beyond the Yakut capital of Yakutsk; for several years he headed the Federation of National Sports of the Yakut Autonomous Republic. In fact, he is a Russian, born and bred on Yakut soil, speaking Yakut as his native tongue. After graduating from the Institute of Physical Culture, he worked as a senior lecturer at the Yakut State University. Kochnev was responsible for making and taking up several important proposals to promote national sports in this northern territory.

Yakutia is, in fact, the only autonomous republic in the entire country that has instituted its own title—Master of National Sports of the Yakut Autonomous Republic. This is a title that over a hundred athletes now bear.

Uniform rules for Yakut national wrestling were adopted in 1975; once again the major credit for this painstaking task must go to Valery Kochnev, now Merited Trainer of the republic. He has been trying to popularise Yakut national sports for more than twenty-five years and is responsible personally for training over fifteen masters of sport of Yakutia. And it is no easy task to obtain this title. For example, a *hapsagai* wrestler has to win first place two years in a row either in the Yakut championships or in the Vassily Manchara Prize competition, or he must become absolute champion of Yakutia.

The popularity of *hapsagai* grows with every passing year, according to Kochnev. "That is why it is so important to work out definitive rules that meet with everyone's approval. As a result of this immense undertaking of the past few years we now have a genuine sports basis for *hapsagai*: a wrestling ring of up to ten metres, a fixed bout duration of ten minutes, six weight categories, illegal holds which could lead to injuries, and so on. I had a great number of helpers in this work."

Sportsmen in the know now refer to the Churapcha or, to be more precise, the Korkin school of free-style wrestling, by which they have in mind the school that has groomed so many excellent masters, like R. Dmitriev, P. Pinigin, N. Zakharov and P. Platonov. However, few realise that Dmitry Korkin who had been winner and prize-winner at *hapsagai* tourneys around the republic, actually began his career in the little settlement of Churapcha in a *hapsagai* group. And even now his pupils are winning matches at the Yakut national festivals.

V. Rumyantsev also enjoys a great deal of popularity in Yakutia; this headmaster of a Verkhnevilyuisk secondary school

was not so long ago a regular leading performer in *hapsagai* tournaments. So skilled was he that he became dubbed "the professor of *hapsagai*"; but he subsequently went on to become an excellent organiser of the sport: he was one of the first to set up groups and sections of national wrestling in his school, thereby passing on his experience to the younger generation with much patience and persistence, teaching them the wiles of the sport and acquainting them with its history. Many of his charges have made a name for themselves, and some of them are at present working as *hapsagai* coaches.

Ilya Kondratiev, many times wearer of the scarlet winner's riband at republic championships, is another *hapsagaist* known far and wide for his strength, skill and craft. But even the best wrestlers cannot go on forever, and the time came for him to hang up his wrestling boots and take on the job of instructor. Among other well-known wrestlers who became coaches are Sergei Li Fu and Victor Mikhailov.

One of the most welcome developments in the sport of *hapsagai*, in the opinion of Valery Kochnev, is the decline in age of its participants. While the average age of participants in the republican spartakiads used to be somewhere between 35 and 40, it has now fallen considerably. This would seem to be a result of the substantial attention which young *hapsagaists* are now granted. They are nowadays taken under the wing of experienced and knowledgeable trainers who make the training sessions interesting and varied occasions; that is why the bulk of a lesson is now devoted to acquiring new techniques and wrestling holds.

The republic now has regular competitive sessions for young people—"open mat" days, team matches, club tournaments for settlements and districts. Only recently a youth group took part for the first time in the republican spartakiads; and this has now become a permanent fixture.

Yakutia has long had a special children's and young people's school for national sports. The school takes in the most able young *hapsagaists* selected by a council composed of well-known wrestling experts. The high prestige enjoyed by the school is enhanced by its members' successful performance in the various contests.

At the present time, more than ten thousand members of all nationalities inhabiting the Yakut Autonomous Republic regularly train in *hapsagai* sections and groups that have been

founded in the remote villages and even in the settlements scattered about the tundra on the shores of the Arctic Ocean. These are the registered enthusiasts; in addition there are literally thousands upon thousands of people who pursue the sport in a casual way. It is a great favourite among reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen who spend many of their leisure hours watching or even engaging in the competitions.

If ever you happen to be at a Yakut festival welcoming the summer—the *ysyakh*, you will undoubtedly be a witness of the mass festivities that are one of the most colourful and memorable sights in the world.

Imagine you are in a vast picturesque glade framed with green bushes. Today it is the setting for the *ysyakh*. From all around, in families, pairs and individually, workers, farmers, employees and schoolchildren make their way here. It is not long before the glade is full to overflowing with a swaying colourful crowd; it seems as if the sun itself is smiling on the festival and sharing the people's joy. Its kindly sunbeams play upon the colourful folk costumes making them glitter and shine with all the colours of the rainbow. And it seems to become even brighter with the flashing smiles, merry jokes and laughter of the people.

Ysyakh is a festival of joy which harks back to the very earliest days of the Yakut tribes: the arrival of warm days to this remote and inclement land was certainly a big event which had to be marked by an exuberant popular celebration of gay songs, dances and games.

The first part of the festival is devoted to the theme of work. The best workers speak from improvised platforms about what has been accomplished, share their thoughts and plans for the future with their audience. When the official part is over, it is the accordion players' turn to continue the proceedings and the mood at once becomes carefree. The packed throng sways from right to left forming a giant circle in time with the inviting strains of the music that resounds around the wide glade. Mechanisers, hunters, milkmaids, shepherds and fishermen all converge in the centre dancing to the traditional "Welcome Warmth". The audience noisily urges on the dancers. After all, what they are representing and celebrating is near and dear to the hearts of everyone. Summer is coming, summer is coming. It creeps timidly, indecisively across the northern lands. Gradually the dance picks up speed—summer is now becoming

bolder. Finally, winter is defeated and the grass and flowers burst through the eternal frost covers; and as if at the wave of a giant wand, bouquets of flowers suddenly appear in the hands of the dancers.

The crowd is now bursting with excitement which only intensifies when the long-awaited wrestlers make their appearance—the *hapsagaists*. The festival is reaching its climax: the list of events includes as a rule several national folk games, yet the popularity of the *hapsagai* is extra special. Success in the wrestling bouts goes to the man who not only has the greatest strength, but to the one with most stamina, the best reactions and the greatest guile. These are precisely the virtues, or so the people say, that a real man should possess. The sport captivates the youth and sends many a flutter through the hearts of all the old-timers standing around. That is why, traditionally, a good half of the crowd at the *ysyakh* normally try their luck at the *hapsagai*. And nobody is surprised when a grizzled character emerges from the crowd, a strong and seasoned campaigner, to take his place in the middle of the ring.

The wrestling pairs come and go; the fans react noisily to each skilful hold and throw, and greet victory with a great roar. Finally, the champions are decided—the real heroes of the festival. Henceforth they are the standards of courage, strong will power, skill and strength. Such are the people, say the old legends, who always defended the weak and the infirm from the rich oppressors—the *toyons*. Legends about them have been passed on from generation to generation, cherished among the people, and expanded with more and more romantic details. Even today the interest in them has not dimmed; the love for the heroes of the *hapsagai* is as great as it ever was.

We have diverged somewhat. While the wrestlers have been getting to grips with one another, a little way from the glade, on the banks of the glorious Lena a bonfire is blazing in preparation for honouring the champions. According to age-old tradition the victors will be presented with meat and a foaming cup of *kumiss* served in elegant old *chorons*.

The flames grow higher around the great cast iron cauldron filled with large pieces of meat as the grizzled old *ogonyor* has the coveted job of supervising preparations. But the *ogonyor* is not simply a super chef at the festivities; his authority is indisputable among the *hapsagaists* for he is the principal referee.

It is these *ogonyors* who have had substantial influence over the years in developing the sport's rules. It was not so long ago that the combatants were strictly forbidden to see each other's face before the bout began. They were therefore led to the fight with a thick cover over their head. The mat was, in fact, a big grass square. The referee pulled off the "veils" and gave the signal for the contest to start.

The duration of bouts used to be unlimited. Sometimes they could go on for several hours and even throughout the whole day. The winner would be the wrestler who could pin down his opponent by three points of the body for just a fraction of a second. In such conditions, it was usual for the heavier fighter to gain victory and, sometimes the defeated wrestler would nod to his opponent uttering:

"He pinned me down by his bulk."

So the *ogonyors* decided that contestants ought to be given a fair chance; and they amended the rules. Now the regulations state quite unequivocally that victory goes to the man who forces his opponent to touch the ground simultaneously with his two arms, knees or any part of his body above the knees. A successful hold or throw that forces a wrestler to lean one hand on the ground is rewarded with a point.

Inasmuch as *ysyakh* is celebrated throughout the length and breadth of Yakutia, it is easy to imagine the widespread support for and knowledge of the *hapsagai* contests. Yet there is a competition which is the most coveted of all, in which victory is particularly valued among the Yakuts. And that is the prize contest named after the legendary hero of the republic Vasily Manchara.

The Yakut legends tell of his skirmishes with the well-to-do masters and their henchmen who oppressed the poor, and how he achieved amazing victories over the tyrants by his *hapsagai* skill. His name is therefore a byword for justice in the Yakut lands.

The Manchara prize is contested every other year and also goes by the name of spartakiad of the generations: up to 500 wrestlers from four age groups compete for the titles, thereby ensuring continuation of the folk tradition. The contests are given the utmost solemnity and ceremony. They commence with a performance by a deeply respected folk bard who chants a hymn in folklore rhyme to the glory of sportsmen of the

older generation who will be passing on to the youth their labour and sporting triumphs.

The popularity of the *hapsagai* continues to mount. This national wrestling style is being increasingly recognised far and wide beyond the boundaries of its native Yakutia, and has received deserved acclaim.

TRUE TO AGE-OLD TRADITIONS

A host of national wrestling styles exist among the diverse nationalities of the Soviet Union. They serve as an excellent means of drawing thousands upon thousands of young people into regular training and the world of physical culture. The variety and originality of national wrestling are truly remarkable.

And this applies as nowhere else to the nationalities that live in Siberia and the Soviet Far East. A spectator who has the privilege of watching, say, a national games spartakiad of this vast region has the hard task of deciding which of the many different and exciting folk wrestling sports he will give preference to: the Yakut, the Buryat, the Tuva, the Khakass, and so on.

The athletes are dressed in tracksuit trousers, knitted buttonless shirts or singlets and soft national boots or plimsolls. Above the shirt they wear a soft waistband. At the referee's signal the exciting bout commences.

No less an important aspect of the contests, besides their sporting significance, is the great friendship among the peoples that they foster. When they compete, the wrestlers not only test their strength, speed and craft, they also get to know one another, they learn about the various sports of their neighbours—and, in turn, they learn of their way of life, their hopes and aspirations, their history and culture. All this makes them members of a great fraternity of sportsmen who keep alive the wonderful traditions of national wrestling and see that they flourish.

For example, the story of how Khakass wrestling—the *kures*—came into existence and developed, as with most other forms of national wrestling, has its roots deep in antiquity. In those far-off times, the Khakassians used elements of wrestling in their work and daily life as natural and indeed necessary movements. Very often it was only sheer strength and an ability to stand up for yourself and your kin that earned the right to live. It took many centuries before wrestling acquired any other

meaning in the lives of the Khakassians, becoming a means of mass physical fitness and one of their main sports.

Eminent Soviet scholars who have investigated the origins of the peoples who now inhabit the regions of Central Asia and Siberia have indicated that the Khakassians once were fond of archery, weightlifting, wrestling and horse riding. We have relics of the ancient culture, their legends and lore which enable us to make fairly confident descriptions of these ancient sports. The legends of folk heroes describe the boundless love and trust among the people for the heroes who protected the people from conquerors and tyrants.

Wrestling has also found its way into the Khakassian folk epos. Just as with many other nationalities, the Khakassians never let a festival go by without its wrestling matches. What is more, preparations for the wrestling tourneys began well in advance of the contests; it is everyone's aim to defeat the winners of the previous festival and establish a reputation. They therefore sent their friends round the various settlements to spread rumours of their own enormous strength and resounding triumphs. That is all part of the war of nerves.

Strongman fighting contests used to accompany Khakassian weddings. The families and relatives of a young pair would nominate wrestlers from their sides. It was especially exciting when the newlyweds were of different settlements. Such marriage tournaments of future relatives would normally end peacefully with the whole clan sitting down to a feast after the bout. It was in these interesting duels fought by grown-ups and boys alike that experienced wrestlers taught the youngsters the technique and tactics of *kures* wrestling—in which the opponents grip each other about the waist and try to throw each other down. Thus, wrestling became a sort of heritage that was passed on from one generation to the next. It was passed on as a folk custom as well as a contest.

In days gone by there was no weight division in the *kures* nor were there any written rules on how the bouts should be conducted. A wrestler who got the better of his opponent would then have to stay around to take on all comers, either defeating them all or handing over his crown to someone else. And according to the custom of the times a winner of one or several bouts in a row did not have the right voluntarily to quit the ring or to refuse to take on new opponents nominated by the fans. He would have to fight on to the bitter end. A match

between two wrestlers would only terminate when one of them had lost two bouts out of the three allotted.

Naturally, *kures* wrestling in pre-revolutionary Khakassia was not something that everyone could engage in, nor was it an ideal sport; it was merely an important feature of the festivals. It was only after the establishment of the Soviet power that *kures* began to take on a truly popular form and become the favourite sport in Khakassian settlements.

When the Khakassian Territory became an Autonomous Region of the Russian Federation in 1930, the first district spartakiads were held. And a great sports festival took place in the village of Askiz. The people who flocked to the sports event witnessed what to them were novel spectacles: football and volleyball matches, short-distance running and long and high jumping. The centre of attention were the contests involving horse riders and wrestlers who came from all the settlements around to take part. One of the oldtimers of Askiz, the centenarian Oolah Todinov recounted how the event created enormous interest among spectators who included many past folk champions, especially the first widely-held *kures* contests. The best wrestlers of the time were from the settlements of Ust-Kandyrla and Beltyry who were virtuosos of all kinds of throws, trips and holds.

The spartakiad in Askiz was more than a district sports occasion; it became essentially the first sports measure taken in Khakassia to set up an organised *kures* championship. Even though the tournament was conducted under the old rules and adjudicated by the former folk wrestlers, and all disputes were settled on the spot, the occasion gave a great fillip to national Khakassian wrestling.

In the years to come, spontaneous *kures* contests could be observed in the timber stock and floating yards and collective farms—wherever men got together for recreation and fun. Everyone had to try his strength and skill, his speed, wiles and craft. They used whatever wrestling mats that lay at hand: soft grass, sand and even snow.

The style of wrestling that goes back to ancient times has now found a new lease of life and is a firm favourite today in the Khakassian land. When in 1940 a spartakiad was held to celebrate the first decade of autonomous regional status, a festival of popular endeavour took place. For the first time it included exponents of the *kures*. And the first official *kures*

champion of Khakassia was a 34-year-old experienced wrestler Pavel Pocheryaev from Tashtyp District.

The years that followed were taken up with war and recovery from the terrible havoc it caused; they naturally demanded enormous effort, and there was no time to bother about sports like the *kures*. However, the dark clouds passed and once again the Soviet sports movement picked up momentum carrying it all the way to those remote Siberian hamlets, summoning the youth to recreation. It was not until 1958 in Abakan that the Khakassian exponents of the *kures* assembled again, this time in the Dynamo Stadium. They had come with the firm intention of making the *kures* a fully equal and regular fixture of the sports undertakings within the region. That was the time when Ilya Troyakov, Pavel Borgoyakov and other representatives of the new generation of wrestlers appeared upon the scene; they were to grace the sport for several years to come and spread the fame of the *kures* far beyond the bounds of Khakassia.

The wrestling enthusiasts of Askiz District were especially active in promoting their sport. Incidentally, it is the sportsmen from this and the neighbouring Tashtyp District who have always made the most effective contribution to furthering Khakassian wrestling. Askiz, for example, became the venue for a large number of competitions and tournaments; many athletes from neighbouring villages and settlements have been drawn to the *kures* contests to celebrate Mechaniser's Day which is held regularly in the district centre. Ilya Troyakov recalls this tournament, "Every collective or state farm delegated a wrestling team to attend the festival. There were so many aspirants that the contests sometimes went on all day."

Other traditional celebrations in the Askiz District are Victory Day and the October Revolution Anniversary. Twice a year, in spring and autumn, district championships take place open to all comers. And increasingly the contests have attracted every nationality—Russians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and the many different Siberians—first as novice participants, then as prize-winners in the national sports. So *kures* is becoming a genuinely folk sport throughout the Khakass Autonomous Region. And like its related folk sports, it often acts as the first step up the ladder to big-time sport. Remarkably, the first Khakassian master of sport, Alexei Karamashev, started off as a regular winner of *kures* contests and then went on to win convincing victories at Graeco-Roman wrestling.

In a speech made in 1965 at a session of the Khakassian Regional Wrestling Federation, Dmitry Mindiashvili, Honoured Master of Sport, Merited Trainer of the USSR and well-known expert on *kures*, had the following to say, "We ought to promote free-style wrestling on the basis of the immense wealth of *kures* wrestling that exists in Khakassia. Yakutia's example has shown clearly enough that it is possible to popularise national wrestling and achieve top results in the various Olympic wrestling styles. I am convinced that our resources are no less than those in Yakutia."

Less than a year passed before the first free-style wrestling section came into existence at the Abakan Polytechnic; it was supervised by Vladimir Charkov, graduate of the Leningrad Physical Culture Institute and prize-winner at regional *kures* competitions. Charkov's section gave a first chance to a man whose name has since been inscribed in the Olympic annals—Ivan Yarygin, twice Olympic free-style champion and USSR Merited Master of Sport.

The best masters of Khakassian wrestling, such as Troyakov, Borgoyakov and Shumakov, have competed equally well at free-style, Graeco-Roman and sambo wrestling. The Khakassian wrestler Nikolai Shumakov achieved the ultimate distinction of taking first prize in his wrestling division at the Olympic Games held in Montreal in 1976. Is that not the best possible tribute to national wrestling?

Kures-continues to flourish and is now part of the spartakiad national games programme for Siberia and the Soviet Far East.

No less interesting is the Tuvinian national wrestling style of *huresh*; it is perhaps the most spectacular, original and truly folk of all the national wrestling. From ancient times exponents of the *huresh* have enjoyed true love and standing among their people; grateful memory of famous heroes remains to the present day. That is how we know the name of the remarkable wrestler Tozur from the Tes Hem *aimak* who was accorded the respectful title of the strongest of wrestlers for his noble bearing and his astounding triumphs.

Like most national wrestling styles, the *huresh* is relatively simple and requires no special equipment. As a rule, the contests take place out in the open in a meadow or on the banks of a river or lake. The wrestlers dress in colourful, bright and unusual garb: leather-trimmed shorts and long-sleeved robes with a narrow strip of material down the back.

The competitions are accompanied from start to finish by a special ritual. First a few dozen young men emerge into a clearing and start a vigorous "eagle dance". So well do they perform that you might well think they had turned into proud magnificent soaring birds. Their motions vary from smooth swaying to sudden rushes that give the impression of fearlessness, strength and felicitous assurance of their own worth; the audience is warmly appreciative of the "eagle dance".

The dance acts as a spur to the participants in the coming tussles; they gain assurance for a successful outcome to their own battles; at first they seem to be declaring their intentions to all assembled and especially their rivals. After that all the wrestlers, without halting their dancing, gradually approach the referees making low bows to them before retiring to opposite ends of the clearing where they split into pairs. However, that is not the end of the eagle dance, for every wrestler will perform it at least once again immediately before he begins his bout: both wrestlers square up to one another in an eagle dance before they get to grips. And then at the close of the bout, the winner will perform his victory dance.

As a rule, Tuvinian contests take place on an elimination basis and the winner of the last pair is proclaimed the overall champion. Nowadays, the *huresh* has four weight categories: up to 56 kg, up to 64 kg, up to 72 kg and over 72 kg. In addition to victories in each weight division, a wrestler may aspire to the title of absolute champion, as is done in many other types of national wrestling.

In *huresh* the wrestler has to possess a very sophisticated variety of holds and excellent technique. All manner of holds on the opponent's trunk are employed, as are trips, scissors, and throws sideways, overhead and backwards. This makes the matches fiercely contested and spectacular; there are no draws in *huresh*.

One of the characteristics of *huresh* is that each contestant has his own second. And they have a big part to play. The second is responsible for making the draw at the start of the contest, presenting his fighter to the spectators and for describing his victories and achievements.

But let us imagine the match has begun. For a while the wrestlers size each other up, try to guess the other's intentions and to thwart them. Then at the appropriate moment each opponent will try to put a hold on the other so as to overpower

him. And if he is lucky, a wrestler may catch his rival off guard for just a fraction of a second and lift him off the ground.

However, it may well happen that the bout drifts on with neither wrestler able to take the initiative; it is now again up to the seconds to intervene, put new life into their charges, tell them what hold to try and how best to catch their opponent off guard. When they see that even their intervention has not helped, the seconds then resort to baiting their men, doing all they can to shame them into action, evoking the honour of their kith and kin. This last resort usually produces the desired effect and goads the wrestlers into effective action. Victory goes to the wrestler who can force his opponent to touch the ground with one or both knees or can hurl him over.

Young people are more and more coming into the sport, which testifies to *huresh*'s growing popularity. Back in 1963 Tuvinian wrestling became part of the match events at the folk games spartakiad of Siberia and the Soviet Far East. Today, *huresh* tournaments are eagerly contested by wrestlers from Yakutia, Buryatia and other autonomous republics and regions in Siberia. To date, however, the Tuvinians have managed to preserve their mastery.

The Tatar-Bashkir national wrestling style *kuresh*—fighting on sashes or towels—is certainly an uncommon sight. This is not simply because the event is popular among nationalities throughout Central Asia, the Urals and Siberia, but because it has retained its particular national flavour yet acquired a truly mass following; it has become the mainstay of the whole sports movement among Bashkirs and Tatars in terms of encouraging sports participation generally and acting as a basis for achieving top results in such internationally-known sports as judo, sambo, free-style and Graeco-Roman wrestling.

Where and when did sash wrestling originate? Its birthplace was the famous spring festival or *sabantui*, which is universally celebrated in every Tatar and Bashkir *aul*. And so it is today. The *sabantui* is a festival in which everyone present joins in the fun and merrymaking: the men and women try to outdo one another in fiery dancing and the men pit their strength and wits in contests of running, horse racing, climbing a slippery pole, fighting on a log or strongman trials.

The *sabantui* is a colourful and varied occasion. But its centrepiece is undoubtedly the *kuresh*.

Moscow played host in the winter of 1972 to a massive sports festival which included bouts put on by the best national wrestlers; the events were followed by millions of sports lovers through the medium of television. Not long before the best strongmen—the *batyrs*—of Tataria demonstrated their expertise in exhibition wrestling in the Baltic seaport of Riga; the event had taken place during the first European Sambo Championships. It has to be said that both the Moscow and the Riga *kuresh* displays gripped the attention and earned the respect of millions of people who had never seen the sport before. The compliments are well merited, for *kuresh* has produced some outstanding sportsmen who have brought their country international fame.

Kuresh is therefore extending its boundaries. It is today hard to find an *aul* along the Volga and even deep in the Urals and Siberia where young and old alike do not look forward with great anticipation to the *sabantui* for the tests of strength, skill and guile they are sure to witness. And it is now no longer embarrassing to the older *batyrs* to lose to the younger fellows; they know they have been able to pass on their rich experience and secrets of the wrestling skill. The victors always gain gifts and sashes embroidered in folk designs. According to time-honoured tradition the overall champion of the *sabantui* had to receive a live sheep which he must hold aloft above his head all the way from the field to the village, thereby once again proving his strength and skill.

The *sabantui* is a national festival with its age-old traditions. Originally it was a pagan festival where people performed ritual dances and rites, made sacrifices in an attempt to appease the gods and gain a rich harvest. Over the years, however, the *sabantui* lost its religious vocation and became predominantly a joyful holiday and a contest of sport.

The *sabantui* traditions are treasured among the Tatar and related peoples who pass on the legends of famous *batyrs* who have defended the people from merciless tyrants. One who enjoys great respect is the brave *batyr* Hafiz Baraz, who was known for his kind heart and compassion for the people. The son of a renowned wrestler, the poor peasant Sahibulla, Hafiz defeated his own father when he was only sixteen and then upheld his family's honour for many long years.

It is told that once a *kuresh* champion from the old Russian

capital of St. Petersburg came all the way to take part in the Kazan *sabantui*; this shows just how widespread the sport was even in those times. The famous guest was introduced to his local challenger and is said to have remarked:

"You call that a wrestler! Standing there in his bark boots!"

The challenger was, in fact, the poor peasant's son Hafiz.

It was not long before the smart visitor from the capital was made to eat his words. In the first half of the fight, the 140 kg giant and victor of countless bouts was quite unable to put a hold on his nimble opponent who weighed no more than 100 kg. After the break, Hafiz went on the attack and completely bamboozled his giant opponent; it was not long before he knocked him off his feet and pinned his shoulders to the ground.

Subsequently the fame of Hafiz Baraz spread throughout the Bashkir steppes and *auls*: each and every fight he had ended in convincing victory. It is said by his contemporaries that the last time he appeared at a *sabantui* wrestling contest was at the age of about 60—and yet he was still strong enough to take on all the strongmen of Arsk District to remain undefeated.

Such famous *batyrs* as Hafiz Baraz and many others brought glory to their native settlements and kept alive the traditions of the *kuresh*.

After 1917, the Tatar-Bashkir sash wrestling began to spread to all the *auls* of the region and *kuresh* became the principal method of attracting people into regular and active sport and exercise. The sport was especially appropriate as an agent of change because of its simplicity and accessibility; it needed no expensive equipment either to practise or to put on as a contest. In the summertime, for example, training and competition may be held in any clearing or meadow. And there has never been any shortage of volunteers to teach the finer points of the art of *kuresh* to enthusiasts. These volunteers have generally been *batyrs* who had made a name for themselves at the *sabantuis*. And the sport owes a great deal to them in helping to popularise the *kuresh* and draw up uniform rules and regulations.

During the 1930s, *kuresh* championships of Tataria enjoyed enormous popularity. They attracted an exceptionally strong field of contestants. However, the war and postwar recovery interrupted the sport's progress and it was not until the early

1960s that the *kuresh* competitions got underway again. Ever since then such championships have been held in Chuvashia, Bashkiria, the Orenburg and other regions of the Russian Federation.

It is a remarkable observation that even in the worst of the war and postwar years, the *sabantui* and Tatar-Bashkir sash wrestling continued to take place in the countryside. Such tournaments and festivals did a great deal to keep up the spirit of the people, helping them to look forward to the future with hope and assurance.

The competition rules of *kuresh*, like the contestants' sportwear, have not undergone any substantial changes. Wrestlers now perform in five weight divisions wearing their track suit trousers, knitted shirts and national boots.

The referee is normally selected from the most respected *batyrs*. The moment he gives the signal both contestants come together in the middle of the ring (the *maidan*) to shake hands; they then throw back their sash over each other's shoulder or tie it round their waist (the sash is made of a soft thick material) before taking hold of each other with both hands.

The technique of the *kureshists* is exceedingly varied, making it somewhat reminiscent of free-style or sambo wrestling. The wrestlers call upon a wide variety of holds and throws during the contest in their attempts to catch their opponent off balance and force him down. Victory is claimed by the one who can pin down his challenger's shoulders in any of the prescribed ways. In doing so, he has to drop to the ground together with his opponent.

Kuresh does not allow a wrestler to take hold of the sash on his opponent's stomach or to twist it; nor is it permitted to trip up and otherwise knock one's opponent to the ground without first getting him away from the mat.

It is frequently argued against national wrestling styles that they are so similar to modern styles like Graeco-Roman, free-style and sambo wrestling, that there is no special need to encourage them. However, this argument completely loses sight of the fact that national sports serve as both a prototype and foundation, a source of reserves for such better known Olympic styles; it is precisely from the national sports that many well-known Soviet athletes began their sporting careers. And they have gone on to win honours in European, world and Olympic competitions.

To give just a few examples from *kuresh*, both S. Safin and S. Hisamutdinov, Merited Masters of Sport and Olympic champions in Graeco-Roman wrestling, started off their wrestling in the *sabantui maidan*. Other *batyrs* who have distinguished themselves both nationally and internationally are L. Salimullin, several times prize-winner in the World Cup, international class masters of sport R. Kamalov, I. Muharlyamov and N. Izmailov, and Russian Federation champions I. Yarullin and R. Sharafutdinov.

Vitaly Kuznetsov from the village of Novo-Mazino in the Tatar Autonomous Republic is another who began his climb to the top in *kuresh* and finished up as Merited Master of Sport, absolute champion of Europe, world champion and silver medallist at the Munich Olympics in judo. As a 17-year-old he defeated many well-known *batyrs* at the republican championships in sash wrestling in 1959 and went on to win honours in the heavyweight division. A year later, after disposing of all challengers he won the overall champion title outright.

The toughness and know-how that Kuznetsov had picked up in *kuresh* helped him to become in a short time a versatile and skilled wrestler in big-time sport. He soon became a master of sport at Graeco-Roman wrestling and won many titles at it, and then took the USSR sambo championship. Despite all these successes, his greatest gift turned out to be at judo.

Contests in Tatar-Bashkir wrestling are becoming increasingly representative and popular. Since 1960, *kuresh* championships have been held for the Russian Federation, their finals attracting over 100 top *batyrs* from all over the Federation. Along with certain other national sports, *kuresh* was included in 1971 in the Uniform All-Russia Sports Classification, so that now wrestlers, who become champions of the Russian Federation or can retain a first or second place at inter-regional competitions in two years out of three, can aspire to the honoured title of Master of National Sports of the Russian Federation.

Besides the above-mentioned tournaments, lovers of Tatar-Bashkir sash wrestling can display their skill in rural *batyr* contests for the Musa Djalil Prize (Musa Djalil was a Tatar poet who posthumously was made Hero of the Soviet Union—he died in a nazi concentration camp.— *Tr.*) in Tataria, at open championships in Bashkiria and Chuvashia.

Over the past few years, innumerable junior *kuresh* competitions have sprung up and gained wide acclaim; they help to draw into active sport a great number of boys as well as acting as a sort of filter through which the most promising wrestlers may be found; in time some of these youngsters will continue the traditions of their illustrious *batyr* forbears.

Serious attention is now being paid to national forms of wrestling because many experienced *batyrs* are willingly giving up their time to coach young wrestlers and setting up new wrestling groups whose number is constantly on the increase. It may well be that somewhere in these groups there are youngsters even today who will one day defend the honour of their *aul*, their republic or their country, and carry its standard in the world's greatest sporting arenas.

National folk games are especially valuable because they may be practised literally in any conditions—even among nomads. So it is hardly surprising that local youngsters should show such interest in national sports. Each nationality and each sports enthusiast has his own particular likes and dislikes. And so it should be as long as young people have every opportunity to choose the sport that best suits their own physical make-up, temperament, taste and habits.

Mankind has long known firearms. It would appear that the rifle, shotgun and pistol should have consigned their hunting predecessors to the museum a long time ago. But that is far from the case. Over the boundless expanses of Russia the ancient art of archery lives on and thrives. True, its military application has long gone out of fashion; no longer do hunters ward off wild beasts or one another with bow and arrows. In sport, however, the bow has retained its place.

A desire to measure one's strength and skill is common to all people. But while some like to do it in the boxing ring, others prefer the chess board. Those of a passionate and hot-blooded disposition may prefer the rough and tumble of team games, while the more taciturn and cool-headed give preference to the quiet solitude of the woods, a taut bow string and sharp arrows with which they test the power of their arm and the sharpness of their eye.

Europe and other parts of the globe are not short of archers even in this day and age; they have their associations and regularly hold national, continental and world championships.

In the very south of Siberia, in the Aginsk Buryat National Area, there is a form of archery that differs considerably from versions elsewhere. It differs not so much in the object of the chase, as in the peculiar national flavouring to the ancient and internationally-known sport of archery. It is known as *sur* archery.

First of all we must explain what a *sur* is. Imagine a leather pouch some 12-15 cm high and a hand's-breadth thick. It is stuffed full of horse hair and has a flat bottom which enables it to stand up without falling over. A dozen or so of these objects are placed in a row on a flat surface which is about four metres long at the front and two metres wide. The shooting takes place in two series with eight arrows in each.

The archers stand at varying distances depending on age. Girls and boys fire the first series from 30 metres, then retire another ten metres. For adults the distances are 40 and 50 metres respectively. The purpose of the sport is to knock each *sur* out of the target area. Any arrow which hits the ground and ricochets out of the target area is not counted. The most valuable *sur* is the one that stands right in the centre; a total of ten points is awarded for knocking it out of the square. The farther the target is from the centre the smaller number of points it carries.

The major distinction of Tuvinian archery is the need not only to hit a small target, but to knock it firmly out of the area. As a result, the bow and arrows are constructed somewhat differently from those normally used in archery: the arrows are solidly made to the thickness of a blunt wooden cane.

The bow is an object of special care. It is very long, sometimes even longer than the person holding it, and it is made from a Siberian larch reinforced by thin strips of horn. Several layers of this material are stuck together with a special glue boiled from sturgeon gristle. This long bow has now been brought up to date: strong nylon thread has replaced the ordinary bow-string. If an old craftsman then adds a fancy design to the finished product you have a real work of art. However, besides artistic perfection, its principal quality is its extremely effective shooting ability.

We have already mentioned the traditional championships of Siberia and the Soviet Far East that have been held since 1959; alongside national sports like wrestling, weightlifting and jumping, the events have invariably included *sur* archery.

Teams from Buryatia, Yakutia, Tuva, the Aginsk and Ust-Ordynsk national areas, the Khakass Autonomous Region, the Chita and Irkutsk regions, and the Altai and Krasnoyarsk territories have all participated in the archery contests. In the finals alone as many as 600 archers normally contest the honours.

There may be those who ask what good this folk sport does, besides enhancing the physique of its exponents. But it does not take much imagination to realise how related this Buryat or Tuvinian archery is to its European and world version. In fact, if you can handle the strong cumbersome bow, with its heavy arrows, the normal model is relatively child's play. And as the results at international events have shown, Buryat and other Siberian archers are as good as the best in the world.

CAUCASIAN FOLK GAMES

The Northern Caucasus is a real macedoine of nationalities, containing dozens of distinctly different peoples with their own customs, language, culture and beliefs. Daghestan alone has more than thirty nationalities; this area of largely hill people amazes visitors with its babel of different tongues—as many as 29 distinct languages and some 70 dialects.

Nature here is magnanimous and unique, laying its imprint on every aspect of life of the local inhabitants, fashioning the Caucasian character—proud and temperamental, patient and responsive, amical and irrepressible. Similar conditions of life and labour have engendered many common features in the habitation, dress, customs and culture, in spite of the language differences. So it is not to be wondered at that this region has given rise to a number of common sports, daring diversions which give on outlet to the boundless energy of Caucasian youth, to their desire to assert themselves and fulfil their ambitions.

Of course, with the radical changes in working conditions, far-reaching changes have occurred too in the Caucasian way of life. Motor cars, motorbikes and helicopters are taking over from the swift Caucasian steeds. No longer do the young blades go courting and flaunting themselves in their Circassian coats, their long shaggy overcoats and tall hats—although they do covet their national heritage more than most modern nationalities. But the march of time is eroding many features of the old life, just as it is doing among the Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Latvians and others: national dress and the various ancient rituals have little place in modern town life and are being confined to the folk festivals.

For a glimpse into the curious customs of the past it is worth a visit to the national games championships of the Northern Caucasus. It takes place regularly once a year but is surely the most colourful of all the national sports meets throughout the Soviet Union. The word quickly gets about when a tournament

is due and thousands flock to see the games. One interesting feature of the sports is that they are accompanied by music. An elderly *djigit* is likely to be sitting on a stool alongside the wrestling square, dressed in a Circassian cloak, a slim belt about his waist containing a traditional dagger. Even when Abu Bekir Kulov was in his sixties, he never missed a single national wrestling contest which invariably requires musical accompaniment. The music plays softly, barely audible while the wrestlers are sizing each other up, but it explodes into a cascade of sound the moment one wrestler is thrown.

The matches begin with the traditional parade and line-up of athletes all dressed in their national folk costumes—the young men wearing long loose shirts tied at the waist with a strong sash, narrow trousers tucked into soft heelless boots known as *ichigi.*

The teams in the parade are presented in the traditional manner:

"Our salaam to the Daghestan team!—Our salaam to the Adygeya team!"

These Northern Caucasus championships are contested by athletes from Kabardino-Balkaria, Daghestan, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Checheno-Ingushetia, Kalmykia, Adygeya and Northern Ossetia. Each team contains its tall muscled youngsters weighing in excess of a hundred kilograms, and its scrawny youths who weigh almost half as much. Both are able sportsmen as the spectators very quickly discover.

The Northern Caucasus team championships encompass national wrestling, throwing and weightlifting in the overall competition. By contrast with the overall championship of Siberia where each participant performs in every event and has to be very versatile, here the athletes are specialists in a particular sport. That is why the slim lightweight wrestlers stand alongside the heavies who specialise in the rock-throwing events.

The wrestlers open proceedings. It would be difficult to enumerate all the different styles of wrestling that exist throughout the country: Tatar, Buryat, Yakut, Georgian, Bashkir... And each one has its only inimitable features. The basis of the national wrestling among the peoples in the Northern Caucasus is the so-called *tutush,* where the vantage point, so to speak, is the cloth sash knotted about the waist of each wrestler. More about wrestling later on; let us just mention

in passing that there are eight weight divisions: up to 55, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80, 90 and over 90 kg. The sport carries with it the title of Master of National Sports of the Russian Federation to gain which you have to take first or second place in two years out of three at the Northern Caucasus championships. Curiously enough, although the weight divisions are adhered to very strictly, there are cases when wrestlers fight in a so-called catchweight match: such matches are confined to heavyweights, light-heavyweights and middleweights. The victor is honoured with the grand-sounding title of "*Djigit* of the Northern Caucasus".

The throwers are the most colourful of all the participants in competitions. They tend to be people of strongman proportions: since they do not have any weight divisions success can only be gained by the superheavies. The small but wiry strongmen who do so well in wrestling have no chance at all in the throwing contests. To be successful you need a heavy build, enormous muscle power and long "levers". As in athletics, experts at the throwing events have to be strongly built. Incidentally, they show results not much less striking than those of best discus throwers and shot-putters.

Rock throwing is a very impressive spectacle. These daring hillpeople remind one of the mythical cyclops of antiquity who tore off chunks of rock and dashed them down the hillside. It is an event that could only have flourished in the mountains and hills. Many Caucasian settlements cling to the side of steep hills with no flat and even spaces for a game of football or a running track. So there is little opportunity for the youth to let off steam except in picking up the plentiful rocks that lie scattered about and seeing who can hurl them the farthest. So down the ages these intrepid hillmen have amused themselves and tested their strength by hurling rocks.

Such competitions have changed very little over the centuries; only the rules were somehow perfected. But as of old, no special equipment or amenities have to be made—just a measuring stick or tape measure to mark out the throws. At the start a line is drawn to mark the throwing point which must not be overstepped. This is also the initial point of measurement. Fairly big stones are chosen for throwing, weighing between eight and ten kilograms. The competitors are invited to select three stones of different shape, but it is unusual for anyone to choose more than one. The throwing itself is very reminiscent

of the discus, though with essential differences. First of all, the discus is a lighter missile and may be projected with a single arm drawn back roughly at shoulder level. A ten-kilo rock could not be handled like that. It is therefore thrown upwards. The rules forbid any twisting of the trunk, while in discus throwing this is the main element in increasing the discus's initial speed of flight.

The results achieved in rock hurling are certainly impressive, although they should not be compared with those attained in discus throwing. A recent winner was the Karachai Kazi Laipanov who hurled the ten-kilo stone 16 m 23 cm; and only a fully-fit athlete could reach such a distance, as anyone would discover if he tried to toss such a weight.

The rock tossers at these contests take part in yet another event on the programme—the two-pood (32 kilos) weight throwing. This is thrown from a given line with one hand by any means chosen, but without turning the trunk. The results of the best throwers are usually in the region of six or seven metres. This is a sport that is much less widespread than the rock tossing. It is, in fact, unknown in some autonomous republics; and at the Northern Caucasus championships the event is thrown open to all comers to display their strength.

Although it would be hard to say for certain, it would seem unlikely that this event could have come into existence by itself in the mountains where a round heavy object could fly anywhere after each throw. It appears to have been given its organised form as a result of a conscious merging of several sports. However that may be, it certainly took a firm hold among the youth in that it enabled them to compete and measure their growing strength. It also no doubt had utility for people engaged in heavy physical labour in farming or industry. In addition, weights such as these have no need of special amenities or additional sports gear. The game can be played anywhere at any time.

The third item on the programme for throwers is stone tossing. This missile must weigh some eight to ten kilograms, as previously, but this time it has to be a round stone, not a flat one. The rules allow the stone to be hurled from a run-up—as long as necessary. However, some athletes prefer to perform the action standing directly behind the throwing mark and hopping from one foot to the other. The result is usually something in the order of fifteen metres. It is, of course,

impossible to register records, in so far as the weight and shape of the stones differ from one competition to another.

This last event would seem to be analogous to putting the shot in athletics. However, at closer inspection distinct differences emerge. How the sportsmen hold the stone depends on their own particular brand of throwing: it is practically impossible to hold a massive rough hunk of rock under your chin, it has to be held like a weight. On the other hand, they normally develop a sharp thrusting style to send the rock forward; this comes in very useful if the athlete ever decides to switch to shot putting. In training the throwers are inclined to practise with heavier objects than those they will use in competition.

How successful the merging of throwing styles can be may be illustrated by the example of the Karachayev expert Kazi Laipanov, many times winner of the Northern Caucasus Games. He had been a keen stone hurler since childhood, but took up shot putting while at school; when he went on to college he took part in both events simultaneously, winning the above-mentioned games and gaining his Master of Sport title in shot putting with a put of 18 m 67 cm. To his misfortune, no Master of Sport title is available for stone hurling—otherwise he could have won both titles; the highest award to which a thrower can aspire is first ranking. And Kazi surpassed that some time ago.

So the throwers have their own type of triathlon at their national games, with overall victory going to the man who aggregates the best results.

The strongmen are as ever held in high esteem. Almost everywhere you will come across groups of bold young men tossing weights about or practising with a cartwheel axle; on the deck of a Black Sea steamer, in a forest clearing, in the shadow of an old windmill or in the railway shunting yards. And everywhere you go a spirit of competition fills the air: who can toss the stone the farthest? Surely this popular sport had a solid foundation in the dim and distant past. Indeed, people can test their strength in a whole number of ways—by seeing who can lift the most in one go, for instance. But to do that you need an object whose weight is easy to regulate—by means of a bar and weights; in any case, if you do not train regularly you can do yourself a serious injury in lifting a very heavy load.

It is different with the dumb-bell which weighs 32 kg; any lad can lift that. And it is nice and easy to handle. In former times you could see this simple piece of equipment wherever there were weights handy. Today the dumb-bell is of an even simpler construction and designed specially for weightlifting exercises. Simplicity, low cost and durability make it the most popular of sporting items.

The dumb-bell enables a person to test his strength seeing who can lift it the most times. Such exercises are popular all over Russia. And in the Northern Caucasus dumb-bell lifting is an invariable ingredient of any championship worth its name.

First comes the press. It is worth remembering that in classical weightlifting, this element was removed after the 1972 Olympics in Munich; there were several reasons for this, the main one being difficulties that it presented for the judges. Over the last few years the boundary between the press and jerk have almost disappeared, and the results recorded in both events have more or less come together. Not that this means that the press itself is of no particular value and can be dispensed with altogether. A smooth lifting of a far from maximum weight, if repeated several times, enables the lifter to build up his strength and acquire a handsome physique, which some young men hanker after.

Contests in weightlifting take place as follows. Participants in the Northern Caucasus championships are divided into four weight divisions—up to 60, 70, 82 and over 82 kg. This evens out the muscle power. Each strongman takes his place on the platform, grabs the weight with one hand and presses it several times, as many, in fact, as he is able. Then, without letting go of the weight, he transfers it to the other hand and once again begins the presses. All in all, winners in the lightest categories put up a result of between 35 and 40 lifts, while the heavyweights do between 60 and 70 lifts.

The next event is a one-handed jerk from floor to full stretch above the head. The lightweights usually manage about fifty of these, and the heavies twice as much or more. The third exercise is to jerk two dumb-bells simultaneously upwards from the chest with both hands. It is rare for anyone to manage more than 25 of these.

The winner is decided on points total. One point is awarded for every correct lift in the one-hand press and the clean jerk. Three points are given for every clean lift in the two-hand

snatch. Thus, what you lose on the swings you may gain on the roundabouts, depending on what is your best event.

So we come to the end of the competitions. The most coveted aim of all the participants is to win the outright award in the overall team score. It is a rule of the contest that the team which wins the cup three years running can keep it for good. That honour has already gone to the teams from the Kabardin-Balkar Autonomous Republic and the Karachai-Circassian Autonomous Region. The score is taken from the overall points total of the wrestlers, throwers and weightlifters. It is not hard to imagine how hotly disputed the competition is for the team prize.

"One day Batradz came upon seven young men, greeted them as custom befits and said,

'I hear tell that you've set up an egg as target on the other side of the water. And I am here to take part in your contest.'

"Straightaway Batradz was handed a bow and arrow. He loosed the arrow but it fell with a plop into the river. The seven young men guffawed loudly.

'I'm not used to shooting at such easy targets,' said Batradz. 'I tell you what: stick a needle into the top of the egg and the one whose arrow pierces the eye of the needle is the winner; he can consider himself a real man.

"So they stuck a needle in the egg, placed the egg on the far bank, and the best youths, the pride and joy of the lower Nart, stepped up one at a time to shoot at the egg across the river. But not a single arrow hit its mark. Then it was that Batradz shot an arrow that flew unerringly right into the eye of the needle."

These lines are taken from the legend *Games of the Young Batradz* which forms part of the Nart epos; they give a unique picture of the popularity of archery in ancient Ossetia. And the more complicated the contest the more honourable the victory. The legendary Batradz refused a chance to win in simple contest and fired his arrow into the river, but triumphed in the hardest way possible. And that is not at all surprising. At a time when hunting was the main means of existence, every man and youth had to be an excellent shot with the bow and arrow.

Right down to the present archery has retained its popularity in Ossetia among old and young alike.

Even more popular, however, are games associated with

shooting that made their appearance with the advent of firearms. One such game, called *hiabah,* is described below.

A long pole is used, which is thickened at the top end. The pole's head is slightly tapered. The object is to hit the head of the pole at a distance of some 250-300 metres—but not simply to hit it. The marksman has gradually to whittle it down with a given number of shots and then break off the head with a single shot.

The normal procedure is for teams consisting of members of the same family or village to take part in the shooting contest. Such a match sometimes runs into a dozen hours or more.

Shooting at full gallop used to be a widespread sport in Ossetia; the target would be a small object like a coin. As one can imagine, such a sport demanded enormous skill. Another variant was for a young man to sit astride a rider's shoulders with a rifle in his hands. At full gallop he would have to hit a handkerchief or Ossetian hat hung on a stake. This target had to be set up no closer than twenty metres from the marksman.

Such contests required a great deal of skill, daring, strength and practice both from the rider and from the marksman. The main ability is to achieve coordination of movement between the rider and the man sitting on his shoulders.

Another sport of special interest was precision shooting which usually took place at weddings. According to ancient Ossetian custom, guests who came to the home of the bride-to-be would be given a small flag on a long pole—i.e., a sort of flagstaff. The maiden would already have prepared in a chest the gifts designed for the person who could knock off the flag. The gifts would normally be a felt cloak or a hat made by the girl herself. The flag would be placed on a pole in the ground between fifty and a hundred metres away. Such shooting contests would last for several days, like the wedding celebrations themselves.

Horse riding contests have always held a special place of affection among the hillfolk of Ossetia in all ages. To be a good rider was considered one of the most important manly skills. Horse races were arranged at all festivals, even to honour the dead. So, for example, a year after the burial of someone it was the custom to hold horse races in that person's memory. The number of riders depended on the circumstances of the dead man's family whose task it was to award prizes to the winners. In most cases they vied for the dead man's possessions—his felt cloak, saddle, dagger or Circassian felt cloak.

Ten or more riders took part in races over flat country, but when the races took place in the hills or mountains, the usual number of contestants was no more than four. The races themselves could be over a straight distance or return to the starting post in a circle. Hill race distances rarely exceeded a dozen kilometres whereas the flat country races could be anything up to 60 km. This was the distance for 12-13-year-old boys!

On the eve of races, the riders would assemble in the settlement from where the start would be made. The host would slaughter a sheep and cook it in honour of the riders.

Races in the hills were often fraught with danger, for in overtaking another rider, a horseman could accidentally knock him sideways over the cliff or topple down himself. That is why the preparation for such races was meticulous. The mounts were specially prepared for the races over a two-three month period, given oats and barley as their fodder. Every morning the horse would be taken to a cold stream and made to wade through it up to its fetlocks and to bathe. As the training progressed the distances would steadily be increased, only reaching the required length in the last few days. The rider himself would take the same amount of time in training as his horse.

Every competitor had several assistant riders who would ride far out of the settlement some time before the end of the race to urge on the tired mount.

Another type of horse race of great popularity was that known either as *alam* or *lam*. These, too, would be held in memory of a deceased. *Alam* was a long strip of fabric stuck to a pole like a flag; to this *alam* would be sewn various objects: a *chuvyak* (Caucasian slipper), handkerchief, belt or holster. The *alam* would be presented to a good rider or owner of the best racehorse and he would set off at a gallop; the object was to catch him up and take the *alam* from him. This race attracted a good many participants whose number could be unlimited. The riders would have to be more than excellent racers; they would have to be expert at what is known as *djigitovka*—i.e., all manner of riding skills and tricks. It was invariably the most strong, skilful and daring young man who won this race.

The flag contest, held at wedding races, was always of great spectacular interest. At a wedding, the hosts would normally present all guests with a flag, and they in turn would pass it on

to their best *djigit*. The young men of the bride-to-be's village would try to retrieve the flag from the guests as they attempted to ride out of the village. This flag contest would sometimes last over ten kilometres. If the guests managed to carry the flag across the boundary of another village, the pursuit would come to an end. There were cases when the flag would pass many times from hand to hand and the race would go on for hours. The guests could whip off the tall fur hats of the local lads at full gallop and carry them away as well. Or the opposite could happen. But in both cases the owners of the hats were obliged to invite the riders back to their homes and show them hospitality.

Sometimes race competitions would take place between different settlements involving the best nominated riders of each village. The owners of racehorses were, as a rule, reasonably well-off countrymen. The poor, of course, could not afford to keep horses for amusement and races, though now and again a peasant's work-horse would enter and win one of the contests. There is a story of the brothers Yenaldiev who had a horse that outstripped all the other horses in Ossetia. It was called Zelimhan. In 1917 Mikhail Yenaldiev first decided to risk his mount in a race; people were amazed when the unknown little grey appeared over the horizon leaving all the well-known racers of Ossetia far behind. From then on Zelimhan raced and won at all the important race meetings: at the capital of Southern Ossetia in 1921, in Alagir in 1922, in Orjonikidze in 1930. Zelimhan would undoubtedly have gone on to even greater honours but 1930 was the last year of his life: he died with the rest of his herd during a fierce storm that swept through his winter pastures.

As mentioned earlier, races were sometimes held over distances of sixty kilometres. Such races as these demanded incredible strength, courage, stamina and skill. And they also needed special courses which could accommodate the multitude of spectators and riders who flocked to them. Such racecourses were the Madzask and the Matsut in Digoria, or the well-known Zilahar in the Alagir Canyon on the Pot plain not far from the settlement of Bad; this had an area of some 2,400 square metres. Another renowned stadium was the course not far from the settlement of Kobi in the Daryal Canyon.

Military pursuits that helped train young men as warriors held a place of honour among the Ossetians. The main attention in these

games centred on an ability to ride well, to shoot accurately at a gallop, to jump off a horse while on the move, to be a good swordsman, to be able to approach and creep up on an opponent to catch him unawares, to climb rocks and to make one's way quickly and surely about the countryside (a form of orienteering). A clearing stands on the left bank of the River Urukh known as Zagi Barz. This was the location for putting the would-be warriors through their paces: they had to undergo contests for strength, skill, jumping, running, weightlifting, shooting ability, they learned to survive hunger and thirst and to bear pain. Pride of place in their training naturally went to the equestrian art: the rider had to learn to be as one with his mount like the mythical centaur among the Ancient Greeks.

Strength and skill have always been highly prized among the Ossetians; that is why so many national sports are associated with these virtues.

From times long past competitions in pole tossing have been held. The poles were not thrown in any fashion, but in the contemporary javelin style, with one hand behind the shoulder. These contests were very popular among hunters—as one would expect. Other professions and trades all had their own favourite games. Nomadic peoples, for example, arranged contests in seeing who could treat rawhide with the *narv* (an oaken hollow trunk with movable lever) in the quickest time; the haymakers would compete in seeing who was quickest to mow hay on the steep slopes of the hills.

Many games were linked with hurling stones—the best means of testing one's strength.

One such stone hurling contest was known as *uehskei dur epparyn* which was rather reminiscent of shot putting in Olympic athletics. A stone weighing between ten and twenty kilograms was placed in the palm of the hand and raised to shoulder height with the little finger bent under the stone. The thrower would sway backwards and forwards several times, then squat and spring up to send the rock hurtling forward as far as possible.

The stone in the folk sport of *khyhei dur epparyn* would be in the shape of a discus; the thrower swings his arm back, gives the stone several swings, then sends it forward and up, as in the manner of the discus throwers of Ancient Greece.

The folk sport of *dur isyn* is a weightlifting event in which a stone of no less than 150 kilograms has to be lifted. There were

strongmen who could even raise such a weight above their heads. If the stone was very big, straps were sometimes tied to it to facilitate lifting.

Another contest involved lifting a man above one's head with one arm; hence the expression common in Ossetia that "he's a real strongman, he can lift a man with one hand".

Ossetia abounds in all manner of folk sports that give full rein to strength and skill. They include climbing a slippery pole, pulling an opponent with a rope and, of course, wrestling, at which Ossetians are among the best in the world.

Age-old sports traditions live on in the Soviet republics of the Transcaucasus—Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Tamashoba is the name given from time immemorial in Georgia to their national folk sports and games. It includes a whole programme of different events: *pundrugi*—running, jumping and national wrestling; *huntrutsi*—similar to *pundrugi* in composition of events but designed only for women according to their physical capabilities; *asparezoba*—archery from the saddle, mounted ball game and various throwing events. Interestingly, the sports contests also encompass the *rokva* or Georgian dancing, and the *mgera*—a variety of table games including chess. One more event is *tskhenosnoba*—a combined programme of equestrian sports.

Probably the most popular sports in Georgia concern horse racing, particularly when it takes place in the hills. Curiously enough, these races usually were on unsaddled horses and formed part of the funeral rites—as such they have continued today in some parts of the republic. But they also have a purely sporting side to them without funeral overtones. These are called *mtidan dashveba*—racing downhill. And indeed, the course for these very arduous and exhausting races starts high in the hills or mountains amid the snow-capped peaks. For five or six kilometres the riders make their way across the hillside, down the rocky inclines and, in some places, where there are no mountain tracks alongside the fast-flowing mountain streams.

Another favourite folk sport in Georgia is the *marula* in which the rider has to cover ten kilometres as fast as possible. The horses are specially prepared for this race over the few months prior to the start; immediately before the race any excess fat is whittled down so that they enter the race as sleek and fit as possible. The same applies to the rider: the ideal

build is to be as slim as a mountain willow. So 14-15-year-old boys are often chosen for the races. The winner by tradition receives a prize equal in value to the steed he rides.

A sport that has already received mention in the early chapters of this book is *tskhenburti.* This is a very old Georgian folk sport like polo. Each team has six riders whose job is to manoeuvre the ball into the opponents' goal or to stop their opponents from scoring. Each horseman carries a *chogani*—a sort of polo stick with a long handle and racket-like blade.

When a rider manages at full gallop to get the ball and trap it in his *chogani,* he charges towards his opponents' goal. He has to evade the six riders facing him; each of them will do all they can to intercept him. The sport requires great skill as in the best medieval tournaments. Just try to keep your seat with several riders charging down on you! It requires a great deal of daring and skill with the *chogani.*

The game of *tskhenburti* has its attack and defence, as in football and hockey. The Georgian game even has its offside position—and it whips up as much fervour among spectators as any modern soccer match.

The great Georgian poet Shot'ha Rust'hveli wrote about the game of *tskhenburti* in his famous poem *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin.*

Rust'hveli was, in fact, a fine horseman who played equestrian games with a great deal of skill. There follow lines from a folk legend about the great poet:

> "Once the Rust'hveli clan enjoyed much rejoicing and merry-making for a whole week. On the final day of the celebration, Rust'hveli invited Queen Tamara and her Consort and a great multitude of exalted Georgians.... After dinner Rust'hveli took his guests to watch a *djigitovka* tournament. He himself was attired in splendid dress and armed with his trusty weapon; his steed had on a magnificent bridle as it bore its master to the *djigitovka.* Rust'hveli was a wonderful sight in this attire and he defeated all opponents. The Queen and her retinue congratulated him on his victory. Rust'hveli suddenly reared up on his horse and sped off like the wind until he disappeared from view. Presently he again came into sight standing on his horse's back, holding his bow and arrows and juggling with them as his steed raced along. As he drew near his guests, Rust'hveli all of a sudden drew back

his bow, took aim and loosed an arrow straight through his hat which he had tossed high in the air."

Now for a few details about *tskhenburti.* The game is played on a pitch of 150-300 by 75-120 m, with a centre circle five metres in diameter. That is where the game is started. The referee tosses the ball up and the game is on. The ball is of rubber with a circumference of 40 cm. The goals measure six metres wide and 3.5 m high, and have a goal area of 20 by 20 m. The *chogani* (about 40 cm long) are wider at the end with a loop of 15-20 cm diameter rather like a *lacrosse* stick.

Competitors have the right to move the whole length of the field hitting the ball with the blade of their *chogani* either when the ball is in the air or on the ground. With the aid of the *chogani* they can catch the ball, intercept it, pass it to a team mate and shoot for goal. The game has one particularly inviolable rule: no player must strike the stick of his opponent with his own stick; nor must he strike his opponent or his opponent's horse. And the ball can only be struck by the *chogani.*

The offside rule differs somewhat from the rule in other games. In *tskhenburti,* it applies to the ball rather than the player. When the ball goes out of play beyond the sidelines or the goal lines, the position of offside takes effect. If the ball happens to roll under the hoofs of crowded horses, where there is a danger of an accident, the referee has the right to stop play and signal a "disputed throw"—i.e., the ball is tossed up and contested by opposing players. Any serious infringement of the rules is punished by a penalty award which is taken from the penalty line on the edge of the goal box.

The match lasts for ten minutes each half with a half-time of ten minutes. After the first half, the teams change ends. If the game ends in a draw after the twenty minute play, extra time is allotted to decide the winner.

Most of Georgia's ancient games centred on the horse. Tbilisi Museum contains two miniature golden statuettes representing horses which were made as long ago as 4 B.C.

Throughout their history the Georgians have often had to withstand attacks from invaders. A mounted knight is a typical symbol of the Georgian people. And in order to prepare for battles, the Georgians practised a great many different games. Pride of place among them was the various equestrian sports which, like *tskhenburti,* have continued down to the present day.

It is interesting that in 138 A.D., the Georgians displayed their horseriding ability before the Roman Emperor Hadrian on the Field of Mars. In honour of this event, the Romans built a statue in their capital which remains to this day.

The Georgian Queen Tamara, a contemporary of Shot'ha Rust'hveli, liked to hold horse races and equestrian sports on a specially constructed racecourse.

In the well-known dictionary of the Georgian language called *Sitkvis kora*, we read that "In ancient times the people would hoist a long pole with a golden or silver cup on the end; at holiday time or at Whitsun the king and his retinue would take the field on their horses and take turns trying to shoot an arrow at this *kabahi* as they rode past. Whoever knocked it down would be given the cup as prize."

These words sum up the ancient game of *kabahi* which has lasted to the present. How exactly is it played? Nowadays instead of a gold cup they use a ball on top of the six-metre long pole. The pole is then stood on clear ground and two teams chosen seated on horseback and armed with bows and arrows. Each competitor has two arrows. The first team lines up some fifty metres from the pole and the riders take turns in galloping towards the pole and loosing an arrow at the ball; each has two shots. Any team member who drops his bow is automatically excluded from the competition.

When everyone has taken a turn, the total number of hits are counted up for each team and the total amount of time spent also estimated. On that basis the team award is made. But the game of *kabahi* often has an individual winner as well, in which case a metal cup or other valuable prize replaces the ball on the pole—and that is handed to the eventual winner.

If you take the trouble to ask rural Georgians what their favourite sport is you are likely to hear the game *tarchia* mentioned. This game is played as a rule at the most popular festivals. Let us imagine that a crowd has gathered in a rural stadium.

"Who wants to play *tarchia*?" goes up the cry. And a good crowd gathers round. Then the most beautiful girl present is selected to pick out a horseman of her favour and tie a bright scarf—the *tarchia*—to his arm. Now it is his duty to do what he can to keep the present. And that is by no means a simple task. For he is at once set upon by three other horsemen and he has to race a full hundred metres to hand the scarf back to the girl.

He needs all his wiles, strength and speed to dodge his pursuers. The young lady herself is the judge and if all goes according to the rules she will present the winner with the *tarchia*. If, however, a rival manages to snatch the *tarchia* away from the first rider during the race, he then takes on the role of pursued and has to make for home to claim his prize from the hands of the lovely maid.

Isindi is probably one of the most complex of all Georgian games. Two sides line up at opposite ends of a special area measuring 150-200 by 40-50 m. Each team is made up of six riders. Within the field of play are drawn lines parallel with the top and bottom lines some fifteen metres away.

The players are armed with spears—*isindi*—about one and a half metres long on the ends of which are leather safety caps. After the draw one of the teams sends a rider forward as a sort of scout. A player from the other side then charges towards him on horseback; the "scout" tries to hurl his spear to hit either the opposing rider or his horse. As soon as the "scout" has crossed into the penalty area where the opposing team is waiting, and has thrown his *isindi*, he must swiftly regain his own area. An opponent charges after him trying to catch him up and hit either him or his mount with his own *isindi*. Once the "scout" has made his ground, he is safe and joins the end of his team's line. When, however, the opponent crosses into the enemy area, he has to turn quickly and get back as soon as possible to his own team, for he will have another member of the other team hot on his heels trying to hit him or his horse with the *isindi*.

The game continues until all the riders from both teams have taken their turn. The main rule of the game is that each player has only one chance to hurl his *isindi* during the match. If he hits a rider he gains two points, if he hits his horse he gains one. But if a rider manages to catch his opponent's *isindi* in flight he gains an extra two points for his team. This is only counted if the *isindi* is intercepted while it is in the air before it touches either the rider or his mount. It is forbidden to throw the *isindi* anywhere but at the target, to strike a rider or his horse with the *isindi* or to "lance" an opponent (the *isindi* has to be thrown).

The team accumulating most points is the winner. If the points' total is the same for both teams, an extra game is played. The points system is as follows: two points for hitting a

rider with the spear; one point for hitting his horse; two points for catching an opponent's spear in flight; and minus two points for crossing the sidelines.

Only four players take part in the game of *radrabagani*; and each man is playing for himself. When the ball is tossed into the playing area each of the four riders has to rush towards it and try to retrieve it. To catch the ball the riders are armed with the sort of "lacrosse" *chogani* that is used in *tskhenburti.* When a player succeeds in getting to the ball, he tries to pick it up in his *chogani* and flick it into the air in one quick movement. The player who catches the tossed ball three times in succession is adjudged to be the winner. As is apparent, the game is short, lasting no more than five minutes as a rule.

Georgia has many other equestrian sports. Yet another is *mkerdaoba,* an entirely unique folk game. Two riders gallop towards each other at great speed, their horses meeting head on. The first one to give way is the loser. It goes without saying that a great deal of careful preparation goes into the game—from the point of view of both the rider and his mount.

Yet another game is known as "stealing the present". It is one of the oldest folk games which usually takes place during the big festivals. A deep ditch is prepared on the playing area with a 2-3-metre high platform on the other side. On top of the platform is a rich gift, like an ancient dish or crystal vase. The rider has to clear the ditch and try to seize his fragile prize while on the move; if he succeeds the prize is his to retain.

The old Georgian game of *lelo* is somewhat similar to rugby. In its primitive form *lelo* was played with any number of players. The game took place over a wide area, sometimes stretching for several kilometres on very rough ground. The contestants would have to contend with spurs, hills, valleys, woods, cascading streams and marshes. Their task was to get a ball into a certain place, say, over the settlement boundary or to the foot of the mountain. Any means could be employed to drive the ball forward—feet or hands. Sometimes they would play the game on horseback and often they would have to ford the swift-flowing Caucasus rivers.

Nowadays *lelo* is played to strictly defined rules on a proper pitch of 90-135 m in length and 60-90 m in width. The match ball is round and made of leather, filled with grass, horse hair or sheep's wool. It weighs 2.5 kg and is 85-90 cm long.

Each side has fifteen members whose task it is to carry the ball beyond the opponents' back line. Whether with or without the ball the players can move freely wherever they wish about the pitch; they can pass the ball in any direction with either feet or hands. The rules of the game allow them to throw the ball with any part of the body, to knock the ball out of their opponents' hands and to stop any member of the opposing side who has got the ball. However, the match code forbids any pushing, tripping or jumping on an opponent.

Another essential feature of the rules of *lelo* is that each player has the right to hold the ball for no longer than five seconds. The game is divided into two halves of thirty minutes each with a ten-minute interval in between after which the sides change ends.

The very old version of the game on horseback is still played as well. In this two equal teams are chosen; the location is usually the area between two settlements. The riders try to take possession of the ball and carry it into their opponents' goalmouth—often having to overcome fences, ditches and streams on the way. Once the ball has been thrown into the opposing *mak* or goal, all the riders have to charge after it.

Another Georgian game is *lakhtaoba*. A large circle is drawn on the playing area. The team that stands outside the circle is the attacking side, the other, inside the circle, is the defence. Those inside the circle place *lakhti* or a belt between their feet; the belt buckle touches the circle line. At a given signal, the game begins and the attackers try to get into the circle to grab the belt. But they have to be nippy so that the defenders do not "tag" them by touching the attacker below the knee with his foot. Defenders have the right to place only one foot outside the circle. One other important rule is that if an attacker succeeds in seizing the *lakhti* he has the right to use this belt to knock all the other belts out of the circle. Meanwhile, the defenders are allowed to step on the belts.

Let us imagine that the attackers have managed to collect all the *lakhti*; they then can have the pleasure of beating their opponents with the belts! However, in the process a defender often succeeds in wrenching a belt away and using the retrieved belt to protect himself.

There are some very unusual games among the Georgian national folk sports. One is *hevsur* fencing using short swords and shields—the so-called *parikaoba*. Contests normally take

place between brothers or close friends. The opponent can be struck with the flat of the sword on the head, shoulders or arms (down to the wrist).

The combatants normally stand so that they reveal as little as possible to their opponent, holding the shield in front of them. Both sword and shield have to act as a single defence and attack, as a joint weapon. The skill lies in making a precise hit on one's opponent without injuring him. The most important feature of the contest is a sense of fair play and comradeship—hence the frequent contest between blood brothers. Children also play the game, but using wooden swords and shields.

Pole vaulting is one of the classical events of athletics; but in Georgian pole vaulting it is a matter of seeing who can vault the farthest rather than the highest. It is a very old form of competition and in the old days was used to ford the mountain streams and gorges. Nowadays it is one of the favourite events in the Georgian settlements.

Abkhazia is an autonomous republic which is a constituent part of the Georgian Republic. It, too, has a game very similar to *lelo*, called *aimtskachara*. Its main feature is that any player who takes the ball away from an opponent cannot pass it to a team mate; he has to carry it through the ranks of the opposing side himself.

In the olden days, one settlement was pitted against another. Each side had to drive the ball into the *amba*—i.e., what in rugby is known as a "touch down" behind the posts. The number of players in each team varies from ten to a hundred; the playing area is also extremely varied—from two-three kilometres to 250-300 metres. But one invariable condition is that each side must be equal in number.

The game starts off as follows. Two team leaders stand facing one another in the centre of the field. The one who has won the "toss" throws the ball up in the air, and at once they both try to hit the ball with a stick back to their team mates. Whoever manages to catch the ball has to carry it to the *amba* line. And that is far from easy because the opposing team tackles the holder of the ball as fiercely as it can. The possessor of the ball often has to dodge and sidestep his opponents and, when caught, engage in a fierce tussle to keep possession of the ball and make the line. If he is stopped the contest is called to a halt and his team leader throws the ball into play once more. But this time the toss up takes place from where the game has

been halted. The side which gets the ball most times into its opponents' *amba* is the winner.

The ball, known as *ampyl*, is of a very strange make. It is made from sheep's skin and filled with wood shavings and fur. By tradition it is the job of a recently married woman to sew the *ampyl*, and it is regarded as a great honour to do so. It is also the custom for the woman to put money inside the ball which goes as prize to the winning team.

Attempts have been made in Abkhazia of late to bring the ancient game of *aimtskachara* up to date. The game has even been tried on a football pitch with thirteen players and two reserves in each team. The game's duration has been fixed at 80 minutes: two halves of 40 minutes with a ten-minute break at halftime. And the game is started in the centre circle by a referee rather than a team captain. In addition, restrictions have been put on excessively rough play: it is permitted to wrest the ball from an opponent but not to use any excessively rough tactics to do so. A player may be caught in possession of the ball, but only grabbed below the head and above the waist. It is also forbidden to trip up the player in possession or to body-check him. Free kicks or penalties are awarded against a team that infringes the rules.

The Chechens, neighbours of the Georgians, have a game rather similar to field hockey. It is known as *augul kerchor* (*augul* is a ball, *kerchor* is driving). In fact, a sort of disc has now replaced the wooden ball—rather like the puck in ice hockey. The game takes place on a pitch measuring 40 by 15 m. The two teams have six players each; each member of the team holds a stick which is about a metre long and three centimetres thick. The players line up along the lines: three forwards, two mid-field players and one back. One of the forward players is a sort of centre forward. He it is who starts by hitting the sphere so that it travels at least half way into the opponents' half. The other team tries to hit it back; the most important aim is to keep the sphere on the move all the time. If it rolls beyond the back line of one team, the other side is awarded two points. If it comes to a stop in one team's half and no one has time to knock it back again, the other side gets one point.

National folk games abound among the Armenians, another of Georgia's neighbours. Like the Georgians, the Armenians have a very old game, like *tskhenburti*, which goes by the name

of *makanahakh*. From ancient times the Armenian people have held sport in high esteem; they took part, for instance, in the Roman Games. In 65 A.D. an Armenian by the name of Trdat was victor in the Roman Games, while in the Olympic Games of 385 A.D., the Armenian athlete Varazdat won the Ancient Greek pentathlon, which included running, jumping, discus, javelin and wrestling. The temple on the island of Ahtamar in Lake Van has high reliefs dating back to the 10th century portraying Armenian wrestlers. And the Armenian code of law known as *Mhitar Gosh* (12th century) even describes the rules of various competitions.

The so-called *Navasard* Games took place many years ago in Bagavan in western Armenia; they were held at the end of summer as a harvest thanksgiving festival that marked the beginning of a new year according to the calendar of pagan Armenia. The Games were dedicated to the fertility god Amanor.

Information on *makanahakh*, which is still played in modern Armenia, may be found in the 4th century chronicles. They even mention two versions of the game—one on foot, the other on horse. In the pedestrian game, a right-angled field is used measuring 90-120 m by 60-75 m. Goals four metres wide and 2.2 m high are placed at both ends of the pitch. As in football, each team consists of eleven players each of which is armed with a stick called a *makan* some 120 cm long. The object of dispute is a wooden ball 6 cm in diameter and weighing about 150 gm. It is this ball that has to be driven into the opponents' goal with the sticks.

The match begins with the ball in the centre circle. The teams first toss up to decide who will "bully off". And the game is on. The rules are strict: for example, it is forbidden to raise the stick above shoulder height and the ball must not rise above waist height. If the ball goes out of play, the non-striking team has the right to put it back into play either from the sidelines where the ball went out of play or from the corner flag if the ball crosses the goal line.

In the horseback version of *makanahakh* (it is this game that is so like the Georgian *tskhenburti*) the ball is made of leather filled with hair. The *makan* sticks are longer, and each team has six riders. It has an additional rule by which the goalminder must not come out of his goal farther than twelve metres. Only the team captain can play the whole length of the field; two players

keep to the left half of the field (from their goal) and two to the right.

In the Armenian game of *chopanakh* the action centres on a pole inserted in the middle of a green sward. It has two strong ropes attached to it, the ends of which are tied to the saddles of riders who are to compete against one another. Each player tries to wind his opponent's rope around the pole. If he succeeds, the opponent will find himself tied up and have his movements restricted; the task is now to unseat him.

Another Armenian game is *nizaki-netum.* This is a game that contains some similarity with contemporary basketball. To five poles are tied a spear, ball, ring, bouquet and one more ring. The rider has to seize the spear while on the move, knock down the ball, get it through the ring, grab the bouquet and throw it through the last ring.

We have already mentioned Armenian equestrian sports. But the republic has any number of "pedestrian" sports as well. For example, it has a very old folk sports known as *berd* (fortress). Two teams take part, each with 10-15 men. One side attacks the fortress while the other defends. A large rock symbolises the fortress and stands in the centre of the playing area. The defenders cluster round the stone to stop it being reached by the attackers who string themselves out over the playing area. Their job is to make a sudden rush and get through to the fortress. The defenders try to "tar" the attackers. If a player succeeds in doing this with the aid of his team-mates (they move around to divert the defenders and catch them off guard) and touches the stone, the fortress is considered captured. One distinguishing feature of the game is that the attackers can take the defenders prisoner. They do so by manoeuvring them out of position away from the stone; and if they can cut off their retreat back to the stone, the ambushed player is out of the game.

IN THE KAZAKH STEPPES, UZBEK VALLEYS AND TAJIK MOUNTAINS

Over the boundless expanses of the Kazakh steppes, horsemen have been famed for their incomparable skill, boldness and hardiness since time immemorial. In antiquity, this region was inhabited by Scythians and Massagets; it later formed the homeland of the Kazakh and Kirghiz nations which inherited from their forfathers a love of the art of horseriding which has come down to the present day.

Back in the last century, the journal *Russky vestnik* wrote, "A child is assigned a foal from a favourite mare born in the same year as the child; they are brought up almost together so that by the time the child is able to sit astride the horse (and that happens when the child has his third birthday) the animal is completely trained and like a household pet.... The Kirghiz *archak* saddle has very high pommels each of which is split in two; the ends that stick out have round holes in which little sticks are thrust.... Instead of stirrups it has deep and wide pouches attached to the saddle trees for the child's feet; the sticks support the child from the sides, the high pommels act as a support from front and back and therefore he sits in complete safety and cannot fall except with the horse."

Such a child was bound to grow into an excellent horseman.

Back in the very early primitive days, the territory of present-day Kazakhstan had its own physical culture that accorded with the existing standards of material and cultural life. Certain distant echoes of that folk culture have reached the present, in particular the emergence of the popular equestrian competition—the *alaman-baiga*, which dates back to the break-up of the primitive age when private ownership and wars appeared as means of plunder.

Alaman was, in fact, a type of war in which an attack was made by an armed cavalry detachment. It was also the name of a warrior who took part in the attack; he had to possess not only skill with weapons but also excellent riding skills. So the sport of *alaman-baiga* appeared as a reflection of *alaman*; it was

an equestrian sports event whose aim was to develop skilful and hardy *ulaman* warriors.

Alaman-baiga races in which the riders have to compete over long distances on rough ground occupy a special place in Kazakh and Kirghiz epos. There is virtually no legend which does not mention such a race or a splendid steed—the true friend of a *batyr*. In the folk tale *Er Tostik*, the gallant steed Tostik Shalkuiryk rescues the *batyr* from an evil witch, helps its master with wise counsel, and takes part in races to bring the *batyr* victory. Similarly the tale of *Kerkula-atty Kendybai* has a steed "which swiftly overtook the fugitives and ran so fast it left no trace of its path". Other popular Kazakh folk tales also tell of the amazing racing steeds of the time.

Just as popular in Kazakhstan and Kirghizia is the short-distance race known as *baiga*. It takes place over ground full of natural obstacles and therefore presents enormous problems to the riders who have not only to possess great courage and physical strength, they must be extremely skilled at horseriding and be able to gauge exactly the power of their mount.

In recent years, *baiga* contests have begun to be held on an even track or racecourse; in such circumstances the distance is increased.

The sportsman's tactical skill is all important in the sport of *baiga*; very often the winner is not the man with the toughest and fastest horse, but the man who can work out the best tactics for the race, correctly evaluate the conditions and sensibly pace his horse.

The ancient Saks had the custom of holding sports contests when somebody was married. According to this custom a young man could only get married after claiming his bride in contest. A custom of marriage contest very similar to the Kirghiz-Kazakh game of *kyz-bori* (wolf maiden) is described in the ancient chronicle. The intrepid explorer Marco Polo also subsequently observed roughly the same game during his travels. These games were prototypes of the modern equestrian Kazakh sport of *kyz-kuu* (maiden-catching race). This is very much a folk game of fun which never fails to entertain and has come down to us without hardly a change.

Kyz-kuu started off as a physical exercise in ancient times. The maiden would present a number of tasks to the warrior, one of which was a horse race. If the suitor were to lose it, he would not have the right to marry the maiden.

Vladimir Dal, author of the first great Russian defining dictionary, described *kyz-kuu* with wit and clarity back in the last century: "The scene is as follows: a young fellow takes on his chosen young maid in contest. This young maid mounts a skilful steed and rides out into open country; she then charges towards a group of young men waving her whip at them. If any of them is not evasive enough, she will wrap her whip round him, shouting, chuckling and inviting him to take her on in contest. And if he is a bold spirit who takes a fancy to the maid he will set off in pursuit. The race begins, the crowd roars, the fair maid rushes as straight as an arrow with the young man in hot pursuit; she twists and turns, rides back and forth. If the young man is forced to relinquish claim to the maid because he cannot catch her and touch her with his hand, then, as they say, he might as well bury his head in the damp mother earth for he will find it hard to live down the shame."

Kyz-kuu competitions are today held in a somewhat different form. A young girl and a *djigit* are called to the start, with the young man beginning his chase a few metres in arrears. And the race is on. The *djigit* tries to catch the girl up and pull a scarf from her sleeve in order to claim his prize. The girl's task is to keep ahead of her pursuer and pass the finishing post first.

Another no less interesting equestrian event is *audaryspak* which requires a great deal of strength, skill, stamina, courage, inventiveness and superb riding skills. It is a contest between two *djigits* during which each of them tries to force the other out of the saddle. The rules cover three weight divisions: lightweight—up to 65 kg, middleweight—up to 80 kg, and heavyweight—over 80 kg.

Horses are very carefully selected for *audaryspak*: the most suitable are those which are sturdy and mobile, not the tallest and biggest because their riders can be more easily pulled down.

Zhorga-zharys is another type of equestrian event that is held during folk festivals in Kazakhstan. *Zhorga* is a pacer distinguished by its special smooth and rhythmic movement. In pacing, the right front leg and the right rear leg, the left front and left rear legs come forward simultaneously. This ability is usually inborn, although there have been cases when the horses can be taught from an early age.

The pacer races are only over a short distance because the horses find it difficult to keep up the trotting motion for very long and change to a gallop. If a pacer breaks the rules three times it is disqualified from the race. Women and girls usually take part in the *zhorga-zharys* competitions.

The *kumis-alu* contests also fall into the category of *djigitovka*. The essence of this contest is for the rider to pick up coins placed a certain distance from one another while he is at full gallop leaning from the horse. In some circumstances the event is made more difficult by putting a small pile of sand or earth on top of the coins.

The game of *kokpar* is worthy of special mention; it has many versions in other countries too. Argentina, for example, has a very popular sport known as *el pato* (the duck); Afghanistan has *buzkashi*, which is also very similar to the game of *kokpar* played at virtually every festival throughout the villages of Soviet Central Asia. The point of the game is to have two teams (their make-up varies) each of which tries to throw an object into the opponents' goal. But the other team can block and tackle to prevent the other getting through. There was a time when the object in use was the carcass of a young goat; now, according to the official regulations issued in 1949, a four-cornered mat measuring a metre square is used instead. All the same, the local people often resort to the old customs during folk festivals.

Zhamby-atu—shooting an arrow while on horseback—is another sport that has enjoyed great popularity among Kazakh *djigits* from ancient times. The riders start about a kilometre from the targets; there are usually some six riders each having his own target. After covering half the distance they have to loose their arrows at the target. To gain a prize they must split a rope woven from horsehair on which the prize is hung from a tall mast. The sport is now sometimes played using firearms to break the rope.

Many forms of equestrian contests among the Kazakhs have now faded into the past, like *saiys* which often resulted in serious injury or even fatalities. This is what an eyewitness once wrote about the contest: "A contest by the name of *saiys* is held at Kara-Kirghiz wakes. Two young men on good steeds armed with spears try to knock one another from the saddle. On occasions two women are pitted against one another.... No retribution is paid for death or serious injury at such contests."

Other folk games and events have existed in olden times in Kazakhstan and Central Asia generally, and have then become popular sports. These include race walking. Numerous sources testify that race walking owes its appearance in European countries to the peoples of Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Here is an extract from a chapter in the work *Siaset-namei* written by the eleventh century vizier Nizam-al-Mulq; the chapter is devoted to foot races. "Foot runners have to be stationed at several points; they have to be paid a monthly wage and given their upkeep. When everything is arranged, news would be brought in a single day of an event that is taking place some fifty *farsangs* away. According to former custom they have to have *nakibs* whose job it is to see that they don't shirk their work."

This is reference to professional runners. The words of Nizam-al-Mulq are of particular interest when he mentions that this service had to be arranged "according to former custom"; this would indicate that such foot runners had existed long before that.

Marco Polo also wrote about the Oriental foot runners and walkers. By his account, professional runners were stationed at distances of three miles apart. In such a way, the organisation of this service is somewhat reminiscent of modern sports relays.

Zhayau-zharys contests are today popular in Kazakhstan. Here the race is run over rough open country at various distances, the most popular being the classical race over "the distance of a day's journey"—i.e., a real marathon, in which the runners would have to dress in everyday attire and surmount a great number of different natural obstacles, including steep hills and mountain streams.

The neighbouring republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan also have similar contests.

Formerly, camel racing—the so-called *tuis-zharys*—was also popular in Kazakhstan.

The list of extant Kazakh national folk sports competitions would not be complete without *kus-samu*—hunting with birds of prey (for which tournaments are held) and *tayak-zhugurtu*—throwing various missiles for distance.

From ancient times Central Asia has been famed for its games that resemble field hockey. Tajikistan, particularly its mountain regions of the Pamirs, is known for the game of *chavgonbozi* which has both pedestrian and equestrian versions.

Pedestrian *chavgonbozi* is very much like classical field hockey which has long been popular in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh across the border. As in field hockey, each side has eleven players. One side of the hockey stick is flat, the other slightly rounded. The ball is to be played and struck only with the flat side of the stick (as, once again, in field hockey). And the goals are similarly of the same dimensions. But the rules of the game differ somewhat. It is interesting that the Garma district of Tajikistan, more precisely the village of Shkev, still has a big playing pitch for *chavgonbozi* which was used many centuries ago.

The equestrian variant of the game is similar to polo. It is played, however, not with long-handled mallets, as in the classical version of the game, and not with rackets as in Georgian *tskhenburti*, but with sticks similar to those used in ice hockey. Mounted *chavgonbozi* is also known as *guibozi*. There is a theory that Tajik *guibozi* derives from *chaugan* which was brought by the Mongolian emperors to medieval India. But the game would seem too primitive and localised for that to be so. The ancient Indian game of *chaugan* is closer to the equestrian sport *chovgan* widespread in Kazakhstan and Kirghizia. But with certain distinctions. Central Asian differs from classical equestrian polo in the dimensions of the ball (it is about three times bigger) and the shape of the sticks (they are not like mallets but long sticks with a sharply bent end).

The equestrian sport of *buzkashi*, like Kazakh *kokpar*, has long been known in the mountainous regions of Tajikistan. The very name (it means fighting for the goat) explains its character. The contest is for a goat carcass which the winning team receives as prize. It has to be both defended against the opposing team and delivered to a certain place.

The mountain streams of the republic have also often been the scene of sports competitions. There is even a name for such contests—*gupsar*. It is the fording of fast-flowing mountain streams on special hide-sewn sacks. The sacks are sewn so carefully that they do not let out any of the air with which they have been inflated. The fastest and most skilful man is the winner in the contest.

Tajiks and Uzbeks living in the hills are masters not only of crossing rivers on the *gupsar* sacks, but also of an even more skilful art which goes by the name of *dorbozi*. It is well-known in circuses as tight-rope walking, but in Tajikistan it is invaluable

as a means of crossing by rope the mountain streams and narrow canyons. *Dorbozi* is a firm fixture of any folk festival in many parts of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Tight-rope walkers who take part in these festivals use special balancing poles, as they do in circuses.

For more than seven hundred years national folk wrestling has been popular in Uzbekistan. No popular celebration would be held in olden times without its *kurash* contests featuring the wrestlers who stand opposed, hands on each other's waist band. Just outside the old town in Tashkent there still stands a place where such *kurash* bouts were held. Even today, especially in the rural parts of Uzbekistan, as soon as the working day is over and the dew begins to fall, the cotton-pickers will gather in the shade of the old plane trees and watch the wrestlers demonstrating their *kurash* art.

Two different versions of *kurash* exist in Uzbekistan—the Ferghana and the Bukhara-Khorezm styles. The traditional dress for both styles is the same: the wide trousers, flat light boots, and the *chapan* (cotton-padded cloak). The cloak is belted with a waist band. Sometimes the *kurashists* perform without anything on their feet.

By old tradition, wrestlers in the Tashkent, Ferghana, Andizhan and Namangan regions prelude each bout with a particular dance. They move round in a circular motion, suddenly stop abruptly, wave their arms, wind their waist bands even more tightly and once again take up the circular dancing. During this ritual dancing (which, incidentally, is quite a useful warming-up) the *kurashists* tend to keep at a distance weighing each other up.

The dance is the initial position for the wrestling contest itself. Finally, the wrestlers come together in the centre of the contest area, grab at each other's waist band and take up a rigid stance. Their muscles strain and their feet are planted firmly apart in the sawdust that is literally sprinkled about the area. First they try to bend their opponent, then they straighten up, then try to shift him, knock him off his feet or pull him suddenly forward and lift him up. Once someone is lifted into the air he is almost bound to lose the bout. This position is considered virtually irreversible. The contestants are given twenty minutes to throw their opponent onto the ground.

In the Ferghana version of *kurash*, strict rules have been introduced which prevent any wrestler from pressing his

thumbs into his opponent's waist, from throwing him over one's head, tripping him, removing one's hands from round the opponent's waist or grabbing him by any other part of his body.

Bukhara-Khorezm wrestling is more varied in its holds and the bouts tend to be faster and fiercer; they permit the contestants to take hold of each other's legs, to trip, to hook the opponent's legs from under him and to throw him over one's head.

This *kurash* style is similar to the Tajik wrestling *gushtingiri* and to the national wrestling of the Kazakhs, Kirghiz and the Turkmens. It is out of an amalgam of styles from all these wrestling variants (as from those of other nationalities in the USSR) that the famous sambo sport originated. And sambo is quickly making a name for itself in other countries.

NATIONAL COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION OF THE USSR (1970)

Russians	129,015,100	
Ukrainians	40,753,200	
Uzbeks	9,195,100	
Byelorussians	9,051,800	
Tatars	5,930,700	
Kazakhs	5,298,800	
Azerbaijanians	4,379,900	
Armenians	3,559,100	
Georgians	3,245,300	
Moldavians	2,698,000	
Lithuanians	2,664,900	
Jews	2,150,700	
Tajiks	2,135,900	
Germans	1,846,300	
Chuvash	1,694,400	
Turkmens	1,525,300	
Kirghiz	1,452,200	
Latvians	1,429,800	
Mordvinians	1,262,700	
Bashkirs	1,239,700	
Poles	1,167,500	
Estonians	1,007,300	
Udmurts	704,300	
Chechens	612,700	(Checheno-Ingushetia)
Mari	598,600	
Ossetians	488,000	
Avars	396,300	(Daghestan)
Koreans	357,500	(Uzbekistan)
Bulgarians	351,200	(Moldavia)
Greeks	336,900	
Lezgins	323,800	(Daghestan)
Komi	321,900	
Buryats	314,700	
Yakuts	296,200	

Kabardians	279,900	(Kabardino-Balkaria)
Karakalpaks	236,000	(Karakalpakia)
Dargins	230,900	(Daghestan)
Kumyks	188,800	(Daghestan)
Gypsies	175,300	
Uigurs	173,300	(Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia)
Hungarians	166,500	
Ingushes	157,600	(Checheno-Ingushetia)
Gagauzes	156,600	(Moldavia, Ukraine)
Komi-Permyaks	153,400	
Karelians	146,100	
Tuvins	139,400	
Kalmyks	137,200	
Romanians	119,300	(Moldavia)
Karachais	112,700	(Karachayevo-Cherkessia)
Adygeis	99,800	(Adygeya)
Kurds	88,900	(Armenia, Georgia, Turkmenia)
Laks	85,800	(Daghestan)
Finns	84,700	(Karelia, Estonia)
Abkhazians	83,200	(Abkhazia)
Khakassians	66,700	(Khakassia)
Balkars	59,500	(Kabardino-Balkaria)
Altaians	55,800	(Altai)
Tabasarans	55,200	(Daghestan)
Nogais	51,800	(Daghestan)
Circassians	39,800	(Karachayevo-Cherkessia)
Dungans	38,600	(Kazakhstan, Kirghizia)
Nenets	28,700	(Yamalo-Nenets National Area)
Iranians	27,500	(Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Turkmenia)
Abazins	25,400	(Karachayevo-Cherkessia)
Evenks	25,100	(Evenk Nat. Area, Yakutia, Taimyr, Buryatia, Sakhalin)
Assirians	24,300	

Khanty	21,100	(Khanty-Mansi National Area)
Czechs	21,000	
Tats	17,100	(Daghestan, Azerbaijan)
Shors	16,500	(Altai)
Chukchi	13,600	
Beludzh	12,600	(Turkmenia)
Rutuls	12,100	(Daghestan)
Evens	12,000	(Chukotka, Kamchatka, Magadan Region)
Slovaks	11,600	
Tsakhurs	11,100	(Daghestan)
Nanais	10,000	(Khabarov Territory, Primorye Territory)
Aguls	8,800	(Daghestan)
Vepses	8,300	(Karelia)
Mansi	7,700	(Khanty-Mansi National Area)
Koryaks	7,500	(Koryak National Area)
Udi	5,900	(Daghestan)
Khalkha-Mongolians	5,200	(Tuva, Buryatia)
Dolgans	4,900	(Taimyr National Area)
Karaims	4,600	
Albanians	4,400	
Nivkhs	4,400	(Sakhalin)
Selkups	4,300	(Yamalo-Nenets National Area)
Afghanians	4,200	(Turkmenia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan)
French	2,500	
Ulchi	2,400	(Khabarovsk Territory)
Indians and Pakistani	1,900	
Saami	1,900	(Kola Peninsula)
Udeges	1,500	(Khabarovsk Territory, Primorye Territory)
Itelmens	1,300	(Koryak National Area)
Eskimos	1,300	(Chukotka)

Kets	1,200	(Krasnoyarsk Territory)
Orochi	1,100	(Sakhalin)
Nganasans	0,900	(Taimyr)
Izhors	0,800	(Leningrad Region)
Tofalars	0,600	(Irkutsk Region)
Yukagirs	0,600	(Yakutia, Magadan Region)
Negidals	0,500	(Khabarovsk Territory)
Aleutians	0,400	(Komandorskiye Islands)
Talysh		(Azerbaijan)
Yagnobs		(Tajikistan)
Shugnes		(Tajikistan)
Rushanes		(Tajikistan)
Khufes		(Tajikistan)
Bartanges		(Tajikistan)
Oroshores		(Tajikistan)
Sarikules		(Tajikistan)
Vakhanians		(Tajikistan)
Ishkashims		(Tajikistan)
Yazgulams		(Tajikistan)
Mundzhan		(Tajikistan)
Megrels		(Georgia)
Laz		(Georgia)
Svans		(Georgia)
Besleneyevs		(Karachayevo-Cherkessia, Adygeya)
Batsbiyts		(Georgia)
Khinalug		(Daghestan)
Andi		(Daghestan)
Botlikh		(Daghestan)
Godoberi		(Daghestan)
Chamalal		(Daghestan)
Bagvalal		(Daghestan)
Tindi		(Daghestan)
Akhvakh		(Daghestan)
Tsez		(Daghestan)
Khvarshi		(Daghestan)
Ginukh		(Daghestan)
Bezhetins		(Daghestan)
Gunzibs		(Daghestan)
Kryz		(Daghestan)

Budukh	(Daghestan)
Archi	(Daghestan)
Chulyms	(Tomsk Region)
Livs	(Latvia)
Enets	(Taimyr)
Alyutors	(Kamchatka)
Kereks	(Chukotka)

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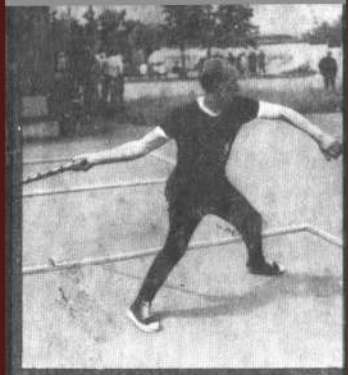
ILYINSKY, V.

BADGES AND TROPHIES IN SOVIET SPORTS

This book gives the history of the Olympic awards, sports badges and medals issued in the Soviet Union in honour of the Olympic Games, World and European championships, USSR Games and various other top contests. It is intended for a broad range of readers and will undoubtedly be of interest to collectors of insignia and sports souvenirs. It is illustrated with colour photographs of unique sports badges from the museum of Soviet sport and the best Soviet collections.



The Soviet Union earned the right to stage the Olympic Games as one of the world's strongest sporting nations. And the attainments of its sportsmen justly belong to all the diverse peoples who populate the world's largest country. Such rich mine of sports talent, now harnessed to our purposeful system, goes deep into popular traditions spanning the centuries. Such are the roots for success of worldrenowned athlets like Vasily Alexeyev, Soslan Andiev, Valery Borzov, Vladimir Yushchenko, Galina Kulakova and Tatiana Averina.